A BOOK BY THE AUTHOR OF SHAPED BY MISTAKES



LOVE LIKE YOURS

Never Really Left ♡

PRATIUSH ADHIKARI

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This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

Pratiush Adhikari asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Note:

1. This book is based on real emotions, drawn from lived moments. While some details have been changed for storytelling, the feelings remain true.

2. The characters reflect pieces of real people. Especially her. She existed—not always in words, but always in feeling.

3. This story was written to remember, not to reveal. It is a personal journey, not an invitation for assumption or judgment.

4. Every silence, every pause in these pages, means something. Some truths were left unspoken for a reason. Respect them.

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For the one whose love didn't just touch me -
it shaped me.
For her warmth, her silence, her patience...
and for everything she gave, even when I didn't know how to hold it.
This isn't just a story.
It's the echo of everything she made me feel.

She never promised forever, but somehow… she stayed in every version of me.

-Love Like Yours

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Foreword

This isn't just a story.

It's a collection of soft heartbreaks, quiet conversations, and the kind of love that doesn't fade - even when it ends.

I didn't write this because I had all the right words.

I wrote it because *some moments deserve to be remembered - even if they don't get to last forever.*

This book is about a kind of love that came silently, stayed deeply, and taught more through its absence than its presence.

It's not perfect.

Just like I wasn't.

But it's real.

And somewhere in these pages, if you've ever loved, lost, or simply sat with silence -

You'll find a part of yourself.

Because this…

was love like hers.

Preface

Some stories aren't written to be explained.

They're written to be felt.

This is one of those.

You won't find perfect moments here, or picture-perfect characters.

What you'll find are feelings — some soft, some confusing, and some that linger longer than expected.

Love Like Yours isn't about proving anything.

It's about remembering.

The little things.

The quiet things.

The things that stayed.

So if you've ever smiled at a memory that no one else would understand…

This book is for you.

Acknowledgments

Writing a book is never just about the writer. Behind every chapter, there are people whose presence, support, and quiet belief help bring the words to life.

I want to thank **Bishnu Basnet** for being a calm and steady guide. Your thoughtful words and quiet wisdom helped me stay grounded whenever my thoughts felt too heavy or scattered.

To **Asmita Paudel**, thank you for your warmth and quiet encouragement. On the hardest days, your support felt like a safe place to return to. You reminded me that sometimes, just being there for someone is the greatest gift.

To **Bibek Khanal**, for showing up in the ways that mattered most — often without needing to say much. Your presence was a kind of strength I'll always be grateful for.

A big thank you to **Naira Publication**, for believing in this story and helping bring it into the world. Your trust and support made all the difference.

And finally, to the readers — especially those who've ever loved softly, lost quietly, or remembered someone in silence — this book carries a piece of you too. It was written with all the quiet emotions that often go unspoken, but never unfelt.

Thank you for being a part of this journey.

I

Somewhere Between Strangers and Silence

Chapter-1: The Space Between Two Eyes
Chapter-2: Not Yet a Love Story
Chapter-3: When Silence Meant More
Chapter-4: She Didn't Ask, But Stayed

1

The Space Between Two Eyes

I don't remember the first time we talked. The details of it - the time, the place, the words - they've all slipped away. Maybe it was a Monday, or maybe it wasn't. Maybe the sky was clear, or maybe the rain was pouring. I couldn't tell you if it was morning or night, or even if it happened in the middle of some ordinary, in-between moment. All I know is, I don't remember any of that. But there's one thing I do remember.

I remember the first time I looked at her. Really looked. And for the first time in what felt like forever, something inside me stopped. It wasn't a loud, dramatic kind of stop, the kind that crashes and breaks. It was quiet. Still. Like everything that had been spinning too fast or shaking too hard in me suddenly found a place to rest.

She wasn't like the girls you see in movies, with their perfect smiles and hair swaying in slow motion as they walk into a room. She didn't have that kind of presence - the kind that demands attention, that turns heads and makes people stare. She wasn't loud, or larger than life. But somehow, when she looked at me,

it was like the whole world went silent, like everything around us faded just enough for me to notice her. Just her.

And when she looked at me - not through me, not past me, but *at me* - I felt something I hadn't felt in so long, I almost didn't recognize it. I felt seen. Truly seen. Not as someone broken, not as someone who needed fixing. Just seen. As if, for the first time, I wasn't invisible anymore.

She tilted her head slightly, her gaze soft but steady, and asked, "Are you okay?"

It was such a small question. Just three words. But the weight of it hit me like a wave, not because of what she said, but because of the way she said it. There was no judgment in her voice, no pity, no impatience waiting for a quick answer to move on. Just a quiet kind of care, like she was offering me all the time in the world to respond.

And I wasn't okay. Not even close. The truth is, I didn't even know what "okay" was supposed to feel like anymore. I'd spent so long pretending, burying everything under layers of silence and forced smiles, that I wasn't sure I wanted to dig it all up. But even so, even with the truth clawing at the back of my throat, the only words I could manage were, "Yeah."

She didn't believe me. I could tell by the way her eyes lingered, by the way her head tilted just a little more, as if she were trying to see through the cracks in my voice. But she didn't push me. She didn't press for more. She just stayed. That was her way. Her love wasn't loud or demanding. It didn't come with conditions or expectations. It didn't rush or force its way in. It was quiet, patient, and steady, like the kind of strength that holds you together when you can't do it yourself.

I think that's where it all began, between us. Not with fireworks or some grand, sweeping moment. Not with a spark

that lit up the sky. It began in the silence. In the stillness. In the space between two eyes and three small words.

2

Not Yet a Love Story

It didn't feel like love in the beginning. It didn't have that overwhelming rush, the kind you read about in books or see in movies. There were no grand declarations, no earth-shattering realizations. It wasn't a lightning bolt, or a tidal wave, or anything big like that. It was quieter. Softer. It felt like comfort. Like coming home to a space you didn't even know you'd been searching for.

Being with her was like finding someone who didn't expect me to perform - didn't need me to wear a mask or play a part. She wasn't looking for the polished version of me. She didn't care about the "me" I showed to the world, the one who smiled on cue, laughed at the right times, and said all the things people wanted to hear. She didn't want the version of me that worked hard to be liked, to be enough. She wanted the messy me. The quiet me. The awkward, unsure, overthinking me.

At first, I didn't understand why. Why someone like her - steady in a way I wasn't, grounded in a way I could never be - would want anything to do with all the chaos I carried. But she didn't seem to mind. She never flinched, never looked at

me like I was too much or not enough. She just kept showing up, in her quiet, unassuming way, like it was the most natural thing in the world.

We weren't anything official. No labels. No definitions. There was no need to explain what we were or what we weren't. It wasn't like that. What we had didn't fit neatly into words or categories. It wasn't the kind of connection you could sum up in a sentence or define with a single word. But it was there, steady and unspoken, in the way she kept finding her way into my life when I needed her most.

Sometimes, it was as simple as a late-night text. A little notification on my phone that would light up the darkness of my room. "Hey, are you awake?" she'd ask, as if she didn't already know I'd be awake. I always was. My mind never quite let me rest, not fully. It was always running, always searching for something to latch onto. But when her texts came, they gave me something else to focus on, something softer, something that felt like a lifeline.

Other times, it was a song link. A quiet, thoughtful gesture that always felt like a gift. She had this way of sending me songs that spoke to things I hadn't even told her, like she could hear the words I couldn't say and find a melody to match them. I never knew how she did it, how she always seemed to know exactly what I needed to hear, but she did. And with every song she sent, it felt like she was saying, "I see you. I hear you. You're not alone."

And then there were the random "What are you doing?" messages. They always came at the right time, when I was spiraling in my own head, overthinking everything and nothing all at once. It was like she could sense when my thoughts were pulling me under, when I was getting lost in the noise of my

own mind. Her questions weren't invasive or demanding. They weren't meant to fix me or pull me out of my own darkness. They were just her way of reminding me that she was there, that I didn't have to go through it alone.

She never said, "I love you." Not in those exact words. But she didn't need to. Her love wasn't the kind that needed to be spoken aloud. It was in the little things, the small gestures that didn't ask for anything in return. It was in the way she remembered the smallest details, like how I always needed a second to process a question before answering, or how I hated the sound of ticking clocks. It was in the way she listened, really listened, without interrupting or rushing to give advice. It was in the way she stayed, even when I pushed her away, even when I told her I was fine and didn't need anyone.

There was one thing she said, though. One line that stayed with me longer than any three-word sentence ever could.

"I know you're not okay even when you type 'I'm fine.'"

She said it so simply, so matter-of-factly, like it was the most obvious thing in the world. But to me, it wasn't obvious. To me, it felt like she had cracked open a part of me I thought I'd hidden too well for anyone to see.

I remember staring at the screen after she sent that message, my fingers hovering over the keyboard, unsure of how to respond. I wanted to argue, to tell her she was wrong, that I really was fine. But I couldn't. Because she wasn't wrong. She had seen through me in a way no one else ever had, and for the first time, I didn't feel exposed or embarrassed by it. I felt… safe. Like it was okay to be seen. Like it was okay to not be okay.

That one line - those thirteen words - meant more to me than she probably realized. It wasn't just that she knew I wasn't fine. It was that she cared enough to notice. She cared enough to

call me out on it, not to shame me or make me feel guilty, but to remind me that I didn't have to pretend with her. That she wasn't going anywhere, no matter how messy or broken I felt.

I don't think I ever told her how much that meant to me. How much she meant to me. At the time, I didn't have the words for it. I didn't know how to explain the way her presence felt like a balm, like something I didn't know I needed until it was there. I didn't know how to tell her that she was the first person who made me feel like I didn't have to fight so hard to be enough, that I could just exist, as I was, and that would be enough for her.

Maybe it wasn't love yet. Maybe it was something quieter, something more tentative, something still finding its shape. But whatever it was, it was real. It was honest. And it was enough.

Looking back, I think that's what made it so special. The fact that it didn't start with fireworks or grand romantic gestures. The fact that it wasn't rushed or forced or wrapped in expectations. It started with comfort. With stillness. With the kind of connection that doesn't need a name to matter.

We weren't a love story. Not yet. But we were something. And sometimes, something is enough.

3

When Silence Meant More

Sometimes, we'd be on the phone for hours and not say a word. No talking, no stories, no updates about our day. Just… silence. Just the soft sound of her breathing on the other end. Just the comfort of knowing she was there. I used to think silence was heavy, like something that sat between people and pushed them apart. But with her, it wasn't like that. Our silences never felt empty. They felt full — full of meaning, of care, of something I couldn't explain but didn't need to.

She used to hum softly under her breath, like she didn't even realize she was doing it. It wasn't loud, not something anyone else would notice, but I always noticed. I always listened. It wasn't a tune I knew, just something she made up in the moment, like it was hers and hers alone. Maybe that's why it felt special, like it was a part of her that no one else got to see.

That soft humming became something I held on to, especially on nights when everything in my head felt too noisy. Nights when my thoughts were all over the place, when I couldn't stop worrying or overthinking. I'd call her, and we wouldn't say much. She'd just hum, and I'd listen, and somehow, her voice

made everything feel less heavy.

There was one night I'll never forget. I was sitting on the edge of my bed, the lights off, the only light coming from my phone screen. I was feeling lost in my own head, my thoughts racing and crashing into each other. But then she started humming, and I closed my eyes. I let her voice fill the room, and for the first time in forever, I didn't feel broken. I felt… okay. I felt like maybe someone understood me, even the parts of me I didn't know how to explain.

It wasn't just the silence that brought us closer. It was what we did with it. She had this way of making quiet moments feel alive, like they were full of something bigger than either of us. Sometimes, when she was with her family, I'd call her, and she'd answer in a soft voice, "Hold on, okay?" I could hear her family talking in the background, the sound of plates and cups clinking, or a TV playing. It felt so normal, like I was getting a little window into her life. Then she'd text me: *"I'm here. Just stay."*

We had a little routine for moments like those. She'd put the call on mute, and I'd do the same. We wouldn't talk, but we'd leave the call open, like an invisible thread connecting us. While the call stayed quiet, we'd text each other instead.

"What are you thinking about?" she'd ask.

"Nothing," I'd reply, even though my head was full of everything. And then, because I knew she wouldn't let me get away with that answer, I'd add, *"You."*

Sometimes, we wouldn't even text. We'd just leave the video call on, our faces lit by the soft glow of our phones. She'd glance at me now and then, her face calm, her eyes quiet, while I played with my hands or stared at my ceiling. It should've felt weird, sitting in silence like that, but it didn't. It felt easy. Like we

didn't have to talk to show we cared. Like just being there, seeing each other, was enough.

I remember one night, in particular. She was sitting in her family's living room, the faint sound of the TV in the background. She had her phone propped up on a stack of books, and her face was half-lit by the warm light of a lamp nearby. She was scrolling through her phone, her expression focused, and I just watched her. Not in a creepy way — more in a way that felt… amazed. She wasn't doing anything special, but there was something about her, something so real and unguarded, that made me feel like I was seeing something important.

She must've felt me watching her because she suddenly looked up and smiled. She tilted her head a little, like she always did when she was about to tease me. *"What?"* she mouthed, since the call was still on mute.

I shook my head and typed a quick reply: *"Nothing. Just you."*

Her smile softened, and she rolled her eyes, but I saw her cheeks turn a little pink. She didn't say anything back, but the way she looked at me in that moment — like I was someone worth noticing, worth staying up for — said more than words ever could.

Other nights, we'd both be lying in bed, the light from our phones the only thing lighting up the dark. We'd text each other little things, like what we were thinking or how our day went, but mostly, we'd just exist together in the same quiet space. Sometimes, she'd fall asleep before I did, and I'd watch her for a little while. I'd watch the way her chest rose and fell, the way her lips parted slightly as she dreamed. It wasn't creepy. It was peaceful. Like seeing her so calm made it easier for me to breathe, too.

One night, I called her after a really bad day. I didn't even

stop to think if she might be busy. I just needed her. The phone rang twice before she picked up, her voice soft but awake. "Hey," she said, and just hearing her say that one word made my chest hurt in a way I couldn't explain.

"I'm sorry," I said quickly. "I didn't mean to bother you."

She was quiet for a moment, and then she said, "You're not bothering me. Stay."

So I stayed. We didn't talk much that night. She hummed softly, her voice low and steady, and I closed my eyes and let the sound fill the room. At one point, she muted the call and sent me a text: *"Are you okay?"*

I stared at the message, my fingers hovering over the keyboard. I wanted to tell her the truth, to let her know everything I was feeling, but the words felt too big and too messy. So instead, I typed back: *"I am now."*

She didn't reply right away, but when she did, her words were simple: *"Good."* And somehow, that was enough.

Love doesn't always come with big confessions. It doesn't always show up with flowers or grand speeches. Sometimes, it's quiet. Sometimes, it sneaks in through the spaces between words. It's in the way someone hums under their breath. It's in the way they stay on the phone with you, even when neither of you has anything to say. It's in the way they look at you when you aren't looking, or the way they let you sit in silence without making you feel like you have to fill it.

She was that for me. She was my silence. My safe place. My peace when everything else felt too loud. She didn't try to fix me or pull me out of my darkness. She just stayed, and that was enough.

She gave me quiet. She gave me comfort. She gave me her presence, and in doing that, she gave me a kind of love I didn't

know existed. A love that didn't need words to be real.

She was my quiet place. And in her quiet, I found mine.Sometimes, we'd be on the phone for hours and not say a word. No talking, no stories, no updates about our day. Just… silence. Just the soft sound of her breathing on the other end. Just the comfort of knowing she was there. I used to think silence was heavy, like something that sat between people and pushed them apart. But with her, it wasn't like that. Our silences never felt empty. They felt full — full of meaning, of care, of something I couldn't explain but didn't need to.

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4

She Didn't Ask, But Stayed

There were nights when I didn't want to talk. When the weight of everything I was feeling-or not feeling-pressed down on me so hard, I couldn't find the words to say anything. It wasn't that I didn't want her around. It wasn't that I didn't care. It was just that sometimes, the numbness took over, and I didn't have the energy to explain it. I didn't even know how to explain it. How do you tell someone you feel like a ghost of yourself? Like you're there, but not really there?

But she never pushed me. She never asked for explanations I couldn't give. She seemed to understand, in that quiet way of hers, that sometimes, it wasn't about finding the right words. Sometimes, it wasn't about words at all.

On those nights, she'd send me a message. Just a simple, *"Want me to just be here?"*

And I would always answer yes. Because even when I didn't know what I needed, I knew I needed her.

She was there. No questions. No pressure. No "What's wrong?" or "Why won't you talk to me?" She didn't try to fix me. She didn't try to pull me out of whatever dark place I

was in. She just stayed. Quietly. Patiently. Like she was saying, *"You don't have to figure it all out right now. You don't have to be okay for me to stay."*

There was one night I'll never forget. I was sitting in my room, the lights off, the air heavy around me. My phone buzzed on the bed beside me, and I picked it up, already knowing it was her.

"Hey. You okay?"

I stared at the screen for a long time. I wanted to answer her, but no words felt right. I didn't want to lie and say I was fine, but I didn't know how to tell her the truth either. So I just typed back, *"I don't know."*

Her reply came almost instantly. *"That's okay. Want me to stay?"*

I didn't even have to think about it. *"Yes."*

And that was it. That's all it took. She didn't ask any more questions. She didn't try to figure out what was wrong or how to fix it. She just stayed.

We didn't talk much that night. I didn't have it in me to hold a conversation, and she seemed to know that. But she didn't hang up. She didn't leave me to deal with it alone. She just stayed on the other end of the line, not saying much, just letting me know she was there.

Sometimes, she'd hum softly, like she always did when she thought I needed it. And other times, she'd just listen to the silence, like she understood that the quiet was the only thing holding me together.

She wasn't the kind of person who needed to fill every empty moment with noise. She was okay with the pauses, with the spaces in between. And that's what made her different. That's what made her feel safe.

There were days when I couldn't even explain why I felt the way I did. Days when everything was fine on the outside, but inside, I felt like I was falling apart. I didn't know how to tell her that sometimes, I felt like I was drowning in my own head. That sometimes, the world felt too big and I felt too small, like I'd never be enough for it.

But she never made me feel like I had to explain. She didn't need a reason to care. She didn't need me to justify why I felt the way I did. She just stayed.

I think that's what love looks like sometimes. It's not always about grand gestures or big, sweeping moments. Sometimes, it's as simple as staying. As simple as saying, *"I'm here,"* and meaning it.

She was the kind of girl who knew that love wasn't about fixing someone. It wasn't about saving them or making their pain disappear. She knew that sometimes, the biggest act of love is just… being there. Just staying, even when things are messy. Even when there's nothing you can do to make it better.

I think that's why I started falling for her. It wasn't because she had all the answers. It wasn't because she made everything better. It was because she made me feel safe, even when I was hurting. She didn't pretend the hurt wasn't there. She didn't try to push it away or cover it up. She just stayed with me in it, like she wasn't afraid of the darkness.

And that mattered. More than I could ever tell her, that mattered.

There was another night, one where I felt like the walls were closing in on me. I couldn't focus on anything. I couldn't think straight. My chest felt tight, like I couldn't get enough air, and all I wanted to do was disappear. My phone buzzed in my hand, and it was her again.

"You don't have to reply," she wrote. *"Just know I'm here, okay?"*

I didn't reply. I couldn't. But I read that message over and over again, and somehow, it helped. Just knowing that she was there, that she wasn't going anywhere, made it a little easier to breathe.

She didn't have to send that message. She didn't have to stay up late, waiting for me to say something, anything. But she did. Because that's who she was.

She was patient. She was steady. She didn't need me to be okay all the time. She didn't need me to have it all together. She just needed me to know that I wasn't alone.

And that's why I fell for her. Slowly, quietly, without even realizing it at first. It wasn't the kind of falling you see in movies, where everything is dramatic and intense. It was softer than that. It was the kind of falling that happens when someone shows you, over and over again, that they care.

She didn't ask for anything in return. She didn't need me to be perfect or even close to it. She just wanted me to know that I mattered, that I was worth staying for.

And for someone like me, who had spent so long feeling like I had to earn love, like I had to prove I was worth caring about, that meant everything.

She didn't save me. She didn't have to. She just stayed. And in staying, she gave me something I didn't know I needed.

She gave me a safe place to fall.

II

The Language She Spoke Without Words

Chapter-5: Of All The Names I Forgot
Chapter-6: Unwritten Rules of Us
Chapter-7: The Only Emoji I Knew
Chapter-8: Just a Cry Baby Again

5

Of All The Names I Forgot

That time of my life was a blur-a dark stretch of days where nothing made sense. It felt like I was walking through a fog, unable to see where I was headed or even where I had come from. Everything was falling apart. My focus was gone. My studies were a mess. Deadlines came and went, and I let them. I wasn't okay, and for the first time in my life, I wasn't even pretending to be.

But she was there.

In that haze, I forgot so much-birthdays, important dates, even my own goals. I didn't remember to call people back. I didn't keep track of the things I used to care about. It was like I had let go of everything, or maybe everything had let go of me. But there was one thing I didn't forget. Her name. Somehow, through all the chaos, her name stayed with me. It was the only thing that didn't feel like weight. It was warmth.

She wasn't just a part of my life during that time-she was the part holding me together. I was technically her senior, but she carried a kind of maturity I had never known. She cared like a teacher, listened like a friend, and stood by me like family. And

while I was falling apart, she stayed steady, like a lighthouse in the middle of a storm.

I remember one day, she looked at me with that quiet intensity of hers and said, "You don't study well these days." Her voice wasn't accusing or harsh. It was soft, almost like she was trying to understand me instead of scold me. I laughed it off, because that's what I always did-I hid behind jokes and smiles, knowing she would see right through them. And she did. She always did.

She didn't push me to talk. She didn't lecture me or make me feel worse than I already did. Instead, she started guiding me in her own quiet way. A little reminder here, an encouraging word there. She'd send me notes she thought might help or suggest we study together, even though she didn't need to. It wasn't just about the words she said-it was the way she said them, like she genuinely believed I could pull myself out of the mess I was in. Slowly, without even realizing it, I started showing up to class again. I started paying attention. I stopped disappearing.

She was never loud about it. She didn't make a big deal out of the things she did for me. But her presence was like a gentle pull, guiding me back to myself, one small step at a time.

And then there was that night.

It was late-maybe midnight, maybe later. I don't really remember the time. I just remember the feeling. My chest was tight, like I couldn't get enough air, and my hands wouldn't stop shaking. My thoughts were spiraling, one after another, faster than I could keep up with. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think. All I could feel was this overwhelming panic, like I was drowning in my own head.

I didn't know what to do. I grabbed my phone, scrolling through my contacts, but every name felt wrong, like calling anyone would just make things worse. Every name, except hers.

I hesitated for a moment, my thumb hovering over her name. It was late. She was probably asleep. I didn't want to bother her, didn't want her to see me like this. But before I could stop myself, I tapped her name and hit call.

She picked up after two rings. "Hey," she said, her voice soft and a little groggy. "What's wrong?"

I opened my mouth to answer, but no words came out. I didn't even know what to say. How do you explain that your own mind feels like it's turning against you? That you're scared of something you can't even name?

"Are you okay?" she asked again, and this time, her voice was more awake, more focused.

"I don't know," I managed to choke out. My voice sounded small, even to me.

She didn't ask for details. She didn't press me to explain. She just said, "Okay. I'm here. Breathe with me, okay?"

I didn't think it would help, but I did it anyway. I listened as she took a slow, deep breath, and I tried to follow her. In and out. In and out. Her voice was steady, calm, like a hand reaching out to pull me back to solid ground.

"You're okay," she said after a while. "You're safe. Just stay with me."

And I did. I stayed on the phone with her, listening to her voice, letting it ground me. She didn't say much, just little things to remind me she was there. "You're doing great," she'd say. Or, "I'm right here. You're not alone."

At some point, the panic started to fade. My breathing slowed, and the tightness in my chest loosened. I didn't feel okay-not completely-but I didn't feel like I was drowning anymore. I felt… steady. Like I could breathe again.

"Thank you," I whispered.

"You don't have to thank me," she said. "I'm just glad you called."

We stayed on the phone for a while after that, not saying much. Just silence, punctuated by the sound of her breathing on the other end. It should've felt awkward, but it didn't. It felt safe.

That night, I realized something. It wasn't just her words that healed me. It was her presence. The way she stayed, even when I had nothing to give. The way she didn't try to fix me or make me feel like I had to explain myself. She just… stayed.

And of all the names I forgot during that dark time, hers stayed. It stayed like a light at the end of a long tunnel I didn't even know I was walking through.

She wasn't just a part of my life-she was the part holding me together. And even now, I don't think she fully realizes what she did for me. How her quiet care pulled me out of a place I didn't think I'd ever escape.

Her name stayed. It stayed when everything else felt like it was slipping away. It stayed when I couldn't find my own footing. It stayed because she stayed. And that made all the difference.

6

Unwritten Rules of Us

We never wrote the rules down. We never even talked about them. But they were there, shaping everything we were and everything we weren't. They weren't the kind of rules you agree to out loud, like promises or deals. They were quieter than that, more natural - like breathing, like instinct.

One of the first rules was this: *we didn't have to pretend.* Around her, I didn't have to act like I had it all together. I didn't have to be the "strong one" or the "smart one" or anything other than exactly who I was in that moment. And the same went for her. She didn't have to smile when she didn't feel like it. She didn't have to explain the parts of her that didn't make sense. We gave each other permission to just… exist.

There were other rules, too. Like how we always showed up for each other, even when it wasn't convenient. Even when it was messy. Even when neither of us had any idea what to say. There was an unspoken understanding: *You don't have to be perfect for me to stay. You don't have to fix yourself before you let me in.*

And then there was the biggest rule of all: *we loved each other.*

Quietly at first, in the way we noticed things about each other that no one else seemed to see. Like how she always hummed under her breath when she was nervous, or how I always tugged at my sleeves when I was overthinking. Our love wasn't loud or flashy. It didn't need to be. It was in the little things, the everyday things, the things we didn't even have to say out loud.

But eventually, it wasn't enough to keep it quiet.

I still remember the night I told her. I'd been holding it in for so long, afraid that saying it out loud might change something between us, might break the delicate balance we'd built. But that night, I couldn't hold it in anymore.

We were sitting in the corner of our favorite café, the one where we always went when we needed to escape the world for a little while. She was talking about something — I don't even remember what it was now, because I wasn't really listening. I was too focused on the way her eyes lit up when she spoke, the way her hands moved as she explained something.

"I love you," I said, interrupting her mid-sentence. The words just slipped out, like they'd been waiting for the right moment to escape.

She froze, her eyes wide, and for a second, I was terrified. But then she smiled — that soft, knowing smile that always made me feel like I was exactly where I was supposed to be.

"I love you even moree," she said, like it was the most natural thing in the world.

And just like that, everything changed, and yet, nothing did. We didn't need to rewrite our rules or redefine what we were. That love had always been there, woven into the fabric of us. We'd just finally said it out loud.

One of the rules we'd always followed was this: *we stayed through each other's darkness.* It wasn't just me leaning on her.

She opened up to me, too, in ways she didn't with anyone else.

She once told me about a part of her life she never talked about - something that had left a scar she still carried. I remember the way her voice shook as she spoke, the way she kept looking down at her hands, like she couldn't bear to meet my eyes.

"I don't know why I'm telling you this," she said.

"Because you trust me," I replied.

She looked up then, her eyes shining with unshed tears, and nodded.

That's the thing about unwritten rules - they're built on trust, on the quiet knowing that no matter what you share, no matter how messy or broken it is, the other person will still be there.

And I was there for her, just like she had always been there for me. I listened when she needed to talk, held her when she needed to cry, and reminded her - over and over again - that she didn't have to face it alone.

It wasn't one-sided, this thing between us. She helped me in ways I couldn't even put into words, but I helped her too. I reminded her of her strength when she forgot it. I saw the light in her when all she could see was darkness. And I stayed - even on the days when she tried to push me away, even on the nights when she didn't know how to let me in.

Another rule of ours: *we didn't give up on each other.* No matter how hard it got, no matter how many times we stumbled, we always found our way back.

She once told me that I made her feel safe, like she could finally let her guard down. "You make it easier to breathe," she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

"You do the same for me," I replied.

And that was the truth. She was my safe place, my steady ground when everything else felt like it was falling apart. And

somehow, I was that for her, too.

Looking back, I think that's what made us work. It wasn't that we didn't have our struggles - we did. But we never let those struggles pull us apart. We stayed. We loved.

The thing about unwritten rules is that they aren't about control or expectation. They're about understanding. About knowing someone so deeply that you don't need to ask for what you need - they just know.

Our rules were simple: *Love each other. Stay through the darkness. Help each other find the light.*

We didn't have to write them down. We didn't have to say them out loud. They were there, in the way we held each other's hands during the hard times, in the way we laughed together during the good times, in the way we always came back to each other, no matter what.

They were written in us.

7

The Only Emoji I Knew

I don't remember when I started doing it, but it became our thing.

Out of nowhere, with no build-up, no background story, no warning — I'd type:

"Aap buri ho "

No explanation. No anger. Just those three words and that one overused, overly dramatic crying emoji that had somehow become *our language*. Not just an emoji. *The* emoji. My only one. The only one that ever mattered when it came to her.

Every time I hit send, I already knew how she'd react. It was a script we both knew by heart, but neither of us ever got tired of acting it out.

A few seconds would pass, and then her message would arrive, like clockwork:

"Ab kya ho gaya?"

Or sometimes: **"What happened now?"**

Always with that subtle undertone of concern — wrapped in mock annoyance, but soft at the edges, like she was holding back from already hugging me through the screen.

And me? I'd just smile. Like a fool. Sitting there, grinning at my phone as if it had just whispered the sweetest secret. Because that message meant everything.

That message meant she still cared.

That she noticed even the smallest shift in my words.

That I had a power over her heart, and she didn't mind giving it to me.

Sometimes she'd catch on, playfully narrowing her suspicion:

"Yeh sab natak sirf mujhe pareshan karne ke liye kar rahe ho na?"

I'd laugh. Because yes — I was. But not in a cruel way. It was the gentlest trick in the book. I wasn't broken. I wasn't crying. I wasn't mad. I just *loved* the way she *loved* me more when she thought I was hurting.

Her reactions were pure poetry.

She'd overanalyze every word she'd sent earlier in the day.

She'd go quiet, then suddenly send three messages at once.

She'd offer reassurance like it was medicine:

"Main hoon na. Acha theek hai. Sorry, agar kuch bura laga ho."

And then, came the teasing.

God, the teasing.

She'd reply with a smirk in her words:

"Haa hu me buri, kya karloge?"

Or worse — better:

"Buri nahi, sabse buri. Now deal with it."

And the banter would erupt into full flame.

I'd pretend to pout. She'd pretend to be proud of her villainy.

I'd call her *"zalim"* — she'd say, *"tum deserve bhi yahi karte ho."*

We'd go back and forth like fire meeting wind, playful and passionate, teasing and tender.

But under all that chaos, there was calm.

Under the jokes, there was truth.

She *loved* being the one I ran to — even if it was through dramatic gifs and false complaints.

And I loved that she gave me the privilege of seeing her care so deeply, even in moments when she knew I didn't really need saving.

Because that's the kind of love we had.

Messy, mischievous, magnetic.

Full of little tricks and private codes.

We were two souls who knew exactly which buttons to press — not to hurt, but to hold.

And for me, that one crying emoji… it became a doorway.

A tiny key that unlocked the most tender side of her.

So yeah, maybe it was silly.

Maybe it was childish.

But to me?

That crying emoji was the softest love letter I ever sent.

And her replies?

They were the kind of poetry no writer could ever match

8

Just a Cry Baby Again

There was this one thing I always did with her - my favorite kind of drama.

No matter what we were talking about, I'd suddenly drop a message out of nowhere. No context, no warning, no emotional build-up. Just this one line:

"Aap mujhse pyar nahi karti "

And with it, I'd send *that* gif.

The crying baby. The loud one. The one screaming at the top of its lungs, red-faced, bawling like the world had ended.

I must've used that gif a hundred times, maybe more. But somehow, it never got old.

Not for me, not for her.

Because the moment she saw it, her tone would change completely.

She'd reply with the softest words - ones that made my heart feel safe again, even if I wasn't really upset.

"Kya huwa mere bachhe ko?"

"Kyu ro raha he?"

That was it. That was *everything.*

Those two lines had more love than any poem.

She could've ignored it. She could've replied with "stop this nonsense."

But instead, she treated me like I was her most delicate little thing.

Like I was hers to protect.

Like my crying - even when fake - deserved her full attention.

And the truth is… I wasn't hurt.

I wasn't crying. I wasn't sad.

But I *loved* how she became extra soft, extra caring, when I acted like I was.

So of course… I kept going.

I'd send the gif again. And again. And again.

She'd try to stay calm at first. But I knew I was testing her patience.

She'd say things like:

"Areyy shant hojao…"

Trying to pacify me, trying to bring the baby (me) back to normal.

And when that didn't work - when I kept sending the crying emoji, or an even sadder one - she'd snap in her classic way:

"Chup. Akdam chup. Warna maar padegi."

I'd laugh. Every single time.

Because even when she said *"maar padegi"*, it felt like a hug.

And I'd reply with another emoji - the one with teary eyes, lips trembling, like I was trying really hard not to cry.

It was fake. All of it.

But the love in it was very real.

I'd annoy her on purpose. Just to hear those lines. Just to see how long she'd entertain my drama.

But I also knew she secretly loved it.

Loved being the one who could calm me.

Loved how easily I fell into this cry-baby role with her.

Because I was only like that with *her*.

Nowhere else. With no one else.

With the world, I acted strong. Calm. Controlled.

But with her, I could be a full-time drama queen (although I am a man) - clingy, needy, loud, annoying… and deeply loved.

I didn't need to act tough with her.

I didn't need to hide anything.

I could cry over nothing.

Send ten gifs in a row.

Complain that she didn't love me - even though I knew she did more than anyone ever had.

And she? She never failed to play her part.

Soft first. Then scolding. Then playful. Then soft again.

We had our rhythm.

Our little inside joke.

Our sweet chaos.

So yes - I was her cry baby.

And proudly so.

Because in those fake tears, and those dramatic gifs, and those one-line tantrums…

…I found a love so pure, even my nonsense felt beautiful.

III

Her Kind of Love

Chapter-9: She Was Never Just a Girl
Chapter-10: Samajhgaya Meri Boss
Chapter-11: Soft Like Mothers, Sharp Like Truth
Chapter-12: Bhaisi, But Only Mine
Chapter-13: This Boy Is Doing Ajeeb Harkat
Chapter-14: Not All Fights End in Loudness

9

She Was Never Just a Girl

She wasn't just someone I talked to.

She was someone I leaned on - without even realizing it.

You see, I've met people before who called themselves friends. People who said they cared, who checked in occasionally, who asked how I was doing but didn't really stick around long enough to hear the answer. With them, it always felt surface-level, like a routine. They said the right words, but the feeling wasn't there. Not really.

But with her, it was different.

She wasn't just someone I texted when I needed company or someone I called when things got tough. She was the one person I could be completely myself with. Whether I was annoyed, tired, frustrated, confused, or just… quiet, I never had to pretend around her. I didn't have to act okay or fake a smile. I didn't have to explain myself.

If I was silent, she stayed. If I was upset, she didn't bombard me with questions or try to fix things I couldn't even explain. She'd just say, *"I'm here,"* and that was enough.

And that's what she always was- there.

Not just like a friend. She was more than that.

She cared like a sister would. She had this way of looking out for me, of making sure I didn't trip over my own mistakes. If I messed up, she'd be the first to call me out, but not in a harsh way. She wasn't afraid to correct me, but she did it because she cared. Because she wanted me to be better.

She had that kind of motherly calm too. The way she'd remind me to eat when she knew I hadn't. The way she'd tell me to rest when she could tell I was overdoing it, even if I never admitted it out loud. She wasn't overbearing or controlling - it wasn't like that. It was the kind of care that made you feel safe, like someone was looking out for you when you forgot to look out for yourself.

She was my emotional support system, my safe space, without ever calling herself that. I don't even think she realized how much she meant to me. That's the thing about her - she never tried to be everything to me. She just was.

There were late nights when we'd talk about everything and nothing at the same time. Sometimes, it was serious - conversations about our lives, our plans, our fears. Other times, it was just silly things, like joking about the random memes we sent each other or making fun of how bad I was at catching hints.

Those late-night talks became a kind of ritual. If I was having a rough day, I'd wait until everything was quiet, then text her. And she always replied. She never made me feel like I was bothering her, even when I knew it was late and she was probably tired.

Sometimes, we wouldn't even need to talk. We'd just stay on the phone, both of us doing our own thing, the silence between us feeling more like comfort than emptiness. She was the only

person I could do that with - just be there, without feeling the need to fill the quiet.

And then there were the times we met in person. They weren't big, planned events. Sometimes, it was just meeting for a coffee or sitting together in the corner of the library. She always had this calm way of being present, like she didn't need to say much to make you feel like you weren't alone.

In college, I used to see her across the room sometimes, and even then, she had this way of grounding me. I'd catch her looking at me, and she'd smile — not a big, dramatic smile, but a small, knowing one, like she understood exactly what I was thinking. And every time, I'd feel this strange mix of shyness and warmth, like she was the only person in the room I cared about.

I think the shyness came from how much she meant to me. Even though we were so close, there were moments when I'd look at her and feel like she was too good to be true. Like, how did I get lucky enough to have someone like her in my life?

I remember one time, we were walking back from class together. It was one of those quiet afternoons, the kind where the air feels heavy but not in a bad way. I don't even remember what we were talking about, but at some point, she stopped walking and turned to me.

"You're really quiet today," she said.

"I'm just tired," I replied, but even as I said it, I knew she didn't believe me.

She didn't push, though. She just nodded and said, "Okay. Let's get coffee. My treat."

It wasn't a big gesture, but it didn't need to be. That was her way of saying, *"I see you. I know something's on your mind. Let me make it a little easier."*

Those little moments made all the difference.

And it wasn't just me leaning on her. She let me in, too. There were times when she was the one who needed support, even if she didn't like to admit it.

I remember one night when we were texting, and she mentioned something that had been bothering her. She didn't go into detail at first, just said she was feeling off. But I could tell it was more than that.

"Talk to me," I said, and for a moment, there was no reply. I thought maybe she'd decided not to share. But then her response came through, longer than I expected.

She told me about something she'd been holding on to — something she didn't talk about often, even with her closest friends. And as I read her words, I realized how much she trusted me. How much it meant that she was letting me see this side of her.

"I don't know why I'm telling you this," she wrote.

"Because you know I'll always listen," I replied.

And I did. I listened, not just that night, but every time she needed me. Because she wasn't just someone who cared for me. She was someone I cared for, deeply.

When people ask me what she was to me, I never know how to answer. Because how do you explain someone who was so many things, all at once? A comfort, a friend, a sister, a mother, and still something more - something I couldn't quite put into words.

So I just say, "She was never just a girl."

She was the person who made things okay, even when nothing else was. The one who stayed when everyone else seemed to drift away. The one who listened when I didn't know how to speak.

She wasn't just someone I talked to. She was someone I leaned on. Someone I trusted. Someone I loved, in a way that didn't need labels or definitions.

She was never just a girl.

She was everything.

10

Samajhgaya Meri Boss

She didn't get angry often. But when she did, it felt like my mom scolding me.

It wasn't the kind of anger that came with yelling or frustration. It was the softer kind - firm, but full of care. The kind that made you feel guilty, not because of what you did, but because you knew she was right.

I used to laugh whenever she got into that mode. "Samajhgaya meri boss," I'd say, grinning like an idiot. Or sometimes, just to annoy her a little more, I'd add, "Samajhgaya meri maa."

She'd roll her eyes, trying to look unbothered. "I'm serious," she'd say, pointing a finger at me like I was a child about to get grounded. But I knew her too well. Deep down, she loved it.

I wasn't mocking her when I called her "boss" or "maa." She knew that. She knew it was my way of calling her mine. Of saying, *I see you. I see how much you care. And I love it.*

Her care was strict, but soft. She didn't demand anything from me, but she made me want to be better. She'd scold me for not studying,skipping meals, for sleeping late, for disappearing without texting back.

"Why do you do this to yourself?" she'd ask, her voice tinged with frustration. "You know you'll feel worse if you don't eat."

"I wasn't hungry," I'd mumble, avoiding her gaze.

"Not an excuse," she'd fire back. "You need to take care of yourself. And if you won't, I'll do it for you."

It wasn't girlfriend behavior. It wasn't just casual concern. It was *maa-level love.* The kind of love that doesn't just check in once in a while but stays. The kind that makes sure you're okay, even when you don't think you deserve it.

And me? I was her cry baby. Her stubborn little kid who only listened when she used that tone - the one that made it clear she wasn't playing around.

There was this one time when I'd been skipping meals for days. Not intentionally, but because I was so caught up in everything going on in my head that I just… forgot. She called me one evening, and I could tell from the way she said *"hello"* that she already knew.

"Did you eat today?"

I paused, knowing I couldn't lie to her. "Kind of."

"What does 'kind of' mean?" she asked, her voice sharp.

"It means I had coffee," I said, trying to sound lighthearted, hoping it would defuse her growing irritation.

"Coffee doesn't count as food!" she snapped. "Do you think caffeine is enough to keep you alive?"

I couldn't help it — I laughed. Not because it was funny, but because she cared so much it almost felt unreal.

"Don't laugh," she said, and I could hear the exasperation in her voice. "You're going to make yourself sick."

"Samajhgaya, meri maa," I teased, still laughing.

She sighed, and I could almost see her rolling her eyes. "You're impossible," she muttered.

But I knew, even in her frustration, there was love. It was in the way she stayed on the phone with me until she heard me open the fridge and start eating something. It was in the way she didn't hang up until I promised her I'd eat properly the next day.

Her love wasn't loud or flashy. It wasn't in grand gestures or big words. It was in the way she paid attention, in the way she scolded me for all the little things I ignored about myself.

And I loved her for it.

I loved the way she cared, even when I didn't ask her to. I loved the way she made me feel like I mattered, even when I didn't feel like I did.

She used to say, "You're so stubborn. You make everything harder than it needs to be."

And she wasn't wrong. I was stubborn. I was difficult. I had a habit of pushing people away, of convincing myself that I didn't need anyone.

But she never let me push her away.

She had this way of standing her ground, of staying even when I tried to make her leave. "I'm not going anywhere," she'd say, her voice steady. "So stop trying to scare me off."

And I'd believe her. Because she wasn't like anyone else.

She didn't let my bad habits or my bad moods push her away. She didn't let my silence make her leave. Instead, she leaned in closer. She stayed.

And that's why I called her "maa." Not just because she scolded me like one, but because she cared like one.

There were times when I thought about how much she did for me, how much she gave without ever asking for anything in return. And I wondered if I ever did enough for her.

I asked her once, "Why do you put up with me?"

She laughed, like the question was ridiculous. "Because I care about you, idiot."

Her answer was so simple, but it hit me harder than anything else ever had.

She cared about me. Not because she had to. Not because I asked her to. But because she wanted to.

And maybe that's why I always listened to her, even when I pretended not to.

Her scolding wasn't just about the little things - the skipped meals, the late-night overthinking, the disappearing acts. It was about something bigger. It was her way of saying, *"I see you. I know you're hurting, even when you won't say it out loud. And I'm not going to let you go through it alone."*

She didn't need to say those words. She didn't need to explain herself. I felt it in every text, every call, every little moment when she reminded me to take care of myself.

And in return, I gave her what I could. My gratitude. My trust. My stupid jokes and my bad habits. And, most importantly, my love.

I never said it out loud - not the way I wanted to. But I think she knew.

She always knew.

So yeah, I called her "maa." And "boss." And every other name I could think of to tease her.

But deep down, I knew what those words really meant.

They meant she was mine.

And I was hers.

11

Soft Like Mothers, Sharp Like Truth

She didn't just care about me-she cared *for* me. There's a difference, though it took me a long time to understand it fully. Most people care *about* you in passing, in a way that's fleeting and surface-level. They'll ask how you're doing, check in once in a while, or send a text when they remember. It's not that it's insincere; it's just not constant. But with her? She didn't just care when it was convenient or when it crossed her mind. She cared *for* me, like it came naturally to her, like it was part of who she was.

And the way she cared wasn't loud. It wasn't about big gestures or dramatic declarations. She didn't go out of her way to prove anything. No, she had this quiet, motherly way of looking after me, one that showed up in the smallest, most unexpected ways. The kind of care you don't notice at first because it's so subtle, so woven into the rhythm of your days that you take it for granted-until one day, you don't.

Her reminders were the first thing I noticed. It started with little messages, seemingly random but perfectly timed. She'd text me right around lunchtime, saying, *"Go eat something."* At

first, I laughed it off. I'd reply with something casual, like, *"Yeah, I will,"* or joke about how she sounded like my mom. But she never said it in a way that felt nagging or overbearing. It wasn't a demand; it was a nudge, a soft reminder that someone out there cared enough to think about whether or not I was taking care of myself.

And it wasn't just about reminding me to eat. Sometimes, if I replied late or didn't respond at all, she'd follow up with *"Pani pio."* Just two words, simple and straightforward, but they carried a weight I didn't fully understand back then. It was her way of asking if I was okay, if I was still human amidst whatever chaos was going on in my life. She couldn't be there in person, but she found ways to show up anyway, even through something as small as a text.

Over time, those reminders became part of my routine, though I didn't realize it at first. I started depending on them more than I'd like to admit. There was something comforting about knowing that, no matter how busy or distracted I got, she'd always check in. Her timing was impeccable, almost like she had a sixth sense for when I needed to hear from her. And then one day, I saw it-her Messenger note. A little status sitting there quietly, like it was meant just for me: *"Pani pio."*

I don't know why it hit me so hard, but it did. Maybe it was the realization that her care wasn't just reactive; it was proactive. She didn't wait for me to say I was struggling or that I needed help. She just knew, somehow, and she acted on it without making a big deal about it. That's what made her feel motherly, in the best way. It wasn't about being dramatic or trying to be a hero. It was about the little things-the kind of things most people overlook but that make all the difference when someone notices them.

Her care wasn't just soft and nurturing, though. She could be strict when she needed to be. If I was being stubborn or unreasonable, she didn't hesitate to call me out. She had this way of shutting me down with one sentence when I was overreacting, and though it stung in the moment, I always knew she was right. She didn't always say what I wanted to hear, but she always said what I *needed* to hear. That's why she felt like a mother sometimes-and a mirror too. She reflected back the parts of me that needed attention, even the ones I tried to ignore.

There was one time, for example, when I'd been staying up late for days on end, running myself into the ground for no good reason. I wasn't doing anything productive; I was just zoning out, scrolling mindlessly through my phone or staring at the ceiling. When she found out, she didn't hold back. *"You're being ridiculous,"* she said, her voice firm but not unkind. *"Go to bed. You can't keep doing this to yourself."*

I wanted to argue, to push back and say it wasn't a big deal. But something about the way she said it stopped me. It wasn't just what she said-it was how she said it. There was no anger, no frustration, just this quiet conviction that made me realize she wasn't scolding me because she was annoyed. She was doing it because she cared. Because she wanted better for me, even when I didn't want it for myself.

She wasn't just kind-she was honest. And that honesty made her care feel real, not forced or performative. She didn't do things because she wanted credit or recognition. She did them because it was who she was. Caring for people wasn't something she had to try to do; it was something she couldn't help but do. It was part of her, like breathing or blinking. And the more I saw it, the more I appreciated it.

I think that's why her voice still echoes in my head sometimes.

Every time I skip a meal or stay up too late or find myself zoning out for no reason, I hear her saying, *"Pani pio."* Or *"Go eat something."* Or *"Take care of yourself."* It's like a piece of her is still with me, reminding me to be kinder to myself, even when I don't feel like it.

She never made a big deal about her care. She didn't try to be anyone's hero. But in those ordinary actions, those quiet gestures that most people wouldn't even notice, she became something extraordinary. She had this way of showing up-not loudly, not with fanfare, but in a way that was steady and unwavering. And that steadiness meant more to me than I realized at the time.

There was one moment that stuck with me more than any other. It was a particularly bad day for me, though I hadn't told her that. I hadn't told anyone. I was in one of those moods where everything felt heavy, and I didn't have the energy to explain why. I hadn't replied to her messages all day, and I figured she'd probably given up on me for the time being. But then, in the evening, I got a message from her. It wasn't long or complicated. Just one line: *"Take a deep breath. It's going to be okay."*

I don't know how she knew I needed to hear that, but she did. And in that moment, I felt something shift. It wasn't that her words magically fixed everything-they didn't. But they reminded me that someone was there, that I wasn't alone in whatever I was feeling. And sometimes, that's all you need. Not a solution, not advice, just the knowledge that someone cares enough to reach out.

That's who she was. The kind of person who cared quietly, consistently, without expecting anything in return. The kind of person who made you feel seen, even when you didn't want

to be. She wasn't dramatic or overbearing. She didn't try to change me or fix me. She just cared, in the simplest and purest way possible. And in doing so, she became something I didn't even know I needed.

She wasn't just someone I could ask for. She was more than that. She was the person who showed up when I didn't know how to ask. The person who cared for me in ways I didn't know I needed to be cared for. And even now, long after those moments have passed, her care lingers. It's in the way I hear her voice in my head when I'm being too hard on myself. It's in the way I try to show up for others, hoping to pass on even a fraction of the kindness she gave me.

She didn't just care about me-she cared *for* me. And that made all the difference.

12

Bhaisi, But Only Mine

She wasn't just a girl to me. She was my *sweetie*, my *lovvie*, my *babeyyyyyyyyyyyyy*… and yeah -**my bhaisi.**

Now I know that word sounds weird. Funny even. If you tell someone, *"I call my girl bhaisi,"* they'd probably laugh or get confused. But to us? It was love. It was inside-joke level bonding. It was mine and hers -**nobody else's.**

I used to say it randomly. Out of nowhere. We'd be talking about something serious, or sometimes not even talking at all. And I'd suddenly type:

"Aap bhaisi ho."

Every time I said that, her response would come faster than anything else I ever texted her.

"Shut up!"

"Aap pagal ho!"

"Arey yar, ma bhaisi jastai xaina k"

And my personal favorite: "Stop calling me that "

But she never really meant it.

Her fake anger?

That was the cutest thing I had ever seen.

Because I knew something no one else did — I could *feel* it in the way she replied — that deep down, **she liked being called bhaisi.**

Not because it made sense. Not because it was beautiful. But because it came from me.

And I never let anyone else use that word for her.

No one.

That was *our thing*.

If someone else even tried to joke like that, I'd go, *"No. Only I can call her that."*

Because that's what she was — **my bhaisi**, my personal little softy, the girl I could tease endlessly… and love even more quietly.

Our love wasn't loud. It didn't come with big gestures, expensive dates, or perfect Instagram captions. It came in teasing. In little jabs. In inside jokes that only we understood. She'd say something serious, and I'd interrupt with,

"Chup kar bhaisi."

And she'd go,

"Why are you like this? I'm trying to be emotional here."

But the truth? Even when she was mad, she was smiling. And I could hear it - that softness in her tone she couldn't hide.

We were **comfortable with each other** in a way not many people get to experience.

There were no filters. No pretending to be extra romantic. We were real. Raw.

And full of moments that no one else would ever find romantic… but to us, they were everything. Sometimes she'd say, *"You never say nice things to me."*

And I'd reply, **"I just called you bhaisi with love, what more do you want?"**

That line always made her lose it - partly out of frustration, but mostly because she couldn't stop laughing.

We didn't say "I love you" a thousand times.

But I did say:

- "Aap bhaisi ho."
- "I love irritating you."
- "Pagli."
- "You're cute when you're mad."
- "My babeyyyyyyyyyyyyy."

And each of those lines, in their own strange, stupid, messed-up way… meant the same thing:

"I love you."

No one else understood our way of showing love. But we did. And honestly? That's all that mattered. There were moments when I'd tease her so much, she'd go completely silent. Like one time, I called her "lovvie bhaisi babeyyyy" in one sentence - just to mess with her.

She replied with:

"You're so annoying. I'm not talking to you anymore."

But guess what? Five minutes later, she texted:

"Pani Piyo."

And that's when I knew - I could annoy her all I wanted, but she still cared. Still stayed. That was the beauty of it. We weren't perfect. But we were **so real**, it felt perfect. Calling her bhaisi was never an insult. It was love wrapped in mischief. A soft punch with a hidden hug inside. I never needed a fancy nickname for her. Because when I said "bhaisi,"

I said it with a kind of love that was only ours. She knew it too.

Sometimes she'd even play along — pretend to be mad, but drop in a soft "idiot" at the end. And that was her way of saying, *"I like it... but don't think I'll admit it."*

People think teasing someone is immature.

But teasing *her*?

That was my way of saying, "I feel safe with you."

Because she never walked away from my annoying side. She embraced it. She *answered* it. She never needed me to be perfect. She let me be stupid, clingy, childish, and full of unnecessary sarcasm — and still chose to stay. And I? I never needed her to change. Not even a little. Because she was **everything** I wanted —

My sweetie,

My lovvie,

My babeyyyyyyyyyyyyy,

And most of all, my bhaisi. Only Mine

13

This Boy Is Doing Ajeeb Harkat

It wasn't a date. Not by anyone's definition.

We didn't dress up, didn't choose some cozy café, didn't sit across each other with coffee mugs and filtered sunlight. There were no flowers, no playlists, no perfect Instagram background.

But what we had… it was more real than all of that.

We met on a street - just like any normal day. No special reason, no occasion. Just because we could. Just because being around each other felt easier than anything else. She didn't have her phone that day. Her sister needed it for assignments, so she brought mine into her world. Funny how one small thing made her feel more connected to my space - my chats, my gallery, my lock screen - it was all hers for that little while.

She held my phone like it belonged to her anyway. And to be honest, I liked that. The way she opened the camera without asking, flipped it around, started recording… it wasn't invasive - it was familiar.

There was no plan, no place we had to reach. So we just walked. Talked. Laughed at stupid things. Gossiped about people neither of us cared about. I don't remember all the words

we spoke, but I remember her voice - how soft it sounded when she was mid-laugh, how playful she got when she nudged me while walking. That energy - it was everything.

The sun was unforgiving that day. I was already drenched. My shirt stuck to my back, my forehead dripping, handkerchief working overtime. She looked at me and said, *"Kasto pasina aako, halka patalo kapada lagauna parxa ni."* I just laughed it off, but inside I was happy. She noticed. She cared.

We stopped at a small shop and bought a water bottle -not two, just one. She took the first sip and handed it to me like we did that every day. I didn't even think twice before drinking after her. That's what comfort looks like, right? Not worrying about things that usually matter —-germs, habits, judgements. Just… sharing. Living.

She sat down near a wall, just for a break. The street was noisy, filled with people who didn't care who we were. And yet, in that crowd, in that chaos, we had this strange kind of peace. I stood next to her, trying to find some air, pressing the cloth to my face like it could save me. She laughed again, *"You really don't know how to handle the heat, do you?"*

"Nope," I said, pretending to die in the most dramatic way possible.

She rolled her eyes, "Dramatic idiot."

And then she picked up my phone again. Started recording random street moments - a chatpate stall, some birds flying over wires, a dog lazily walking in the corner. And then she turned the camera back to me.

I wasn't ready. But that was the point. She never wanted me to be.

So I did the most 'me' thing I could think of - I went into a full bowling action, right there, in the middle of a dusty, hot

street. Arms swinging, full motion, like I was in a stadium.

And she burst out laughing.

I can still hear her voice, clear as day.

"**This boy is doing ajib harkat, as usual.**"

That sentence. That moment. That laugh. It all got recorded in the video. But the real version? The one that got recorded in my heart - it's a hundred times louder.

She kept the camera steady for a second longer. Still smiling, still looking at me like I was the biggest clown and her favorite person at the same time.

There was no script, no setup.

But it felt like the most beautiful short film we ever shot together.

After the laughter calmed down, she called her sister using my phone. I watched her switch from playful to responsible in a blink. *"Are you doing your assignment properly?"* she asked. Her voice had that same big-sister energy - soft but strict. I just watched her while wiping my face. It was like watching two sides of the same girl - one who laughed at my madness, and one who held everything together for the people she loved.

She handed the phone back with a smile. *"She's just scrolling reels,"* she said, half annoyed, half amused. I smiled too. Because that's who she was - the girl who kept others in check while still being effortlessly herself.

We talked some more. Shared a few stupid inside jokes. I clicked her photo while she wasn't looking. She took a thousand of mine, most of them bad on purpose. She knew I hated being clicked, which is exactly why she wouldn't stop.

"I need to remember how stupid you looked today," she said.

I replied, "You're just jealous of my bowling skills."

She rolled her eyes again. *"Pagal."*

That word. That tone. It was more affectionate than any "I love you" we ever said.

I don't remember everything we spoke about. But I remember how it felt.

Easy. Comfortable. Close.

Not like a date, but definitely something more than just two people passing time.

I think somewhere, quietly, our hearts knew that days like these weren't always going to be this simple. That memories like these would one day become stories we tell ourselves when we're trying to fall asleep. But in that moment, it didn't matter. We had time. Or at least, we thought we did.

She sat. I stood. She smiled. I sweated. She clicked pictures. I made faces.

And in the middle of it all, she laughed again and said, *"This boy is doing ajib harkat."*

And just like that, a regular street, a cheap water bottle, and a bad bowling action turned into one of the most important days of my life.

14

Not All Fights End in Loudness

We fought often.

Not the screaming kind of fights. Not the dramatic slamming of doors or shouting over phone calls. It wasn't loud like that. It was… quieter. More painful in its own way.

Most of the time, I was the one angry. I'd snap. Say something with too much weight, too little thought. She? She never shouted back. Never matched my volume. Her voice never rose. But her eyes… they said everything. Every time we fought, she stayed quiet — not because she didn't have anything to say, but because she didn't want to hurt me back.

She would cry. Silently.

And that silence? It was louder than any shouting could ever be.

I can still remember those moments. I'd be typing furiously, upset about something silly, or something that felt huge in the moment. And while I was letting everything out, she was just… taking it in. Not because she deserved to, but because she loved me enough to handle even my worst sides.

But the thing is - even after all that, even after the cold replies

or the ignored messages or the long pauses - love was still there.

It never left the room.

I'd message later, softer this time. *"I love you."*

And she'd instantly reply:

"I love you even moreeee."

That one line… it made everything slow down. It reminded me that even in the worst fights, even when we both were hurting, she never stopped choosing me.

Our fights became more regular after a point. Not every day, but often enough that we started carrying the weight of the last one into the next. It was exhausting sometimes. But weirdly… it also became a part of our rhythm. I'd flare up, she'd go silent. We'd both cool down separately, then come back together like magnets that couldn't help but find their way back.

We didn't always fix things on the same day. Sometimes the words stuck for too long. Sometimes we both shut down and prayed for the other to break the silence first. And in those gaps, there was anxiety - tight in the chest, loud in the mind.

But never once did I doubt that she still loved me.

And never once did she make me feel like she was going to walk away because of it.

There was this one day - she went to a café with her friends. It was a sudden plan. I kind of knew, partly, but not everything. I remember feeling something twist in my chest that day. A strange blend of surprise, discomfort, maybe a little jealousy - but mostly, fear. Fear of her world growing beyond me. Fear of her laughing with someone else when she used to laugh with me like that.

We spoke later that night. Things weren't okay. I said things.

Harsh things. Words that I didn't really mean but still said.

She couldn't understand what was behind them - the panic,

the ache, the stupid longing to feel needed. She only heard the sharpness, the frustration. And it hurt her. I know it did.

That night was one of the worst.

There were tears. There were too many messages. Too many pauses between typing and deleting. It didn't feel like a fight. It felt like something bigger. Like the beginning of a shift.

I remember feeling that tightness in my throat — the kind that comes when you know you messed up, but you don't know how to fix it yet.

She didn't yell.

She didn't scream.

She just kept saying, *"You don't understand."*

And I didn't. Not fully. Not then.

There were dramatic parts too. Maybe too much overthinking. Maybe too many expectations from both sides that we never said out loud.

It all came crashing together in that one night.

But even after that…

Even when the tone changed, even when the way we spoke softened into fewer words, less emojis, less teasing…

The love didn't vanish.

It just… changed form.

Like rain turning into mist. You don't feel it pouring anymore, but it's still around you.

After that night, things didn't go back to how they were.

But we still spoke.

Still cared.

Still remembered to ask if the other ate, drank water, got enough sleep.

Not every love ends in a grand breakup.

Some just slow down, until you both are still standing there…

but not as close as before.

And yet -

Not a single fight between us ever made me stop loving her.

Not one silence from her ever felt like the end.

Because even in our worst moments, there was always a quiet hope, a tiny voice saying: *"She still loves you. And you still love her."*

That was the kind of love we had.

It didn't always come with soft songs or long calls.

Sometimes it came with space.

Sometimes with waiting.

But it always came back.

Until I realized, not this time….!

IV

When The Moon Looked Like Her

Chapter-15: Some Nights Were Softer
Chapter-16: Still Her, Somehow
Chapter-17: The Hush in Her Goodbye
Chapter-18: Last Seen, Still Felt
Chapter-19: The Cry Baby Grew Up

15

Some Nights Were Softer

Some nights really were softer.

Not because they were quieter, or the air was cooler, or the world was calmer. They were softer because… *she was there.*

There were nights when everything in my life was upside down - classes I was missing, stress building up, sleep schedules shattered, health down the drain - but I'd still be okay.

Because she was there.

She didn't have to do anything big. Sometimes, it was just her texts. *"Khaana kha liya?"*, *"Soya nahi ab tak?"*, *"Pani pike so jaooo."*

And I'd lie. I'd say, "Haan haan, sab ho gaya."

But she knew. Somehow, she always knew.

There was a kind of magic in her presence. I don't think I noticed it back then. Not enough, anyway. I thought I was the one taking care of myself. I thought I had it handled. But now, looking back… I realise it wasn't me. It was her.

It was her words, her tone, her silly check-ins, her constant "pani pio" reminders - jo mujhe sambhale hue the.

Nights with her were different. Softer, like the chaos inside

me took a pause.

I still remember how she'd reply late at night. Not because she had to — but because she *wanted* to be there. If I messaged her at 12:27 AM saying, "I can't sleep," she wouldn't ask why - she'd say, *"I'm here. Talk to me."*

And sometimes, we didn't even talk. She'd send a song. A voice note. Or just stay online without typing anything.

And that was enough.

She didn't try to fix me. She just stayed close enough so I didn't fall apart.

Now?

Now the nights aren't soft anymore.

They're heavy.

They're loud in the silence.

They make the room feel colder, even when it's not.

I find myself staring at the same screen we once talked through, the same time zones we once shared… only now, it's me and this blank document. No *"good night babeyyyy"*, no *"I'm sleepy but not sleepy without talking to you."*

Just me.

And this story.

I've started writing our story on these sleepless nights. Not because I want to - but because it's the only way I can hold on to her without falling apart.

You know what's strange?

Sometimes I cry without realising.

One second I'm typing, and the next, I feel tears on my cheek.

It's not dramatic. It's not even loud crying. It's just… silent. Like my heart remembers before my mind does.

Late nights, teary eyes, and memories. That's my routine now.

I sit here, headphones on, trying to write about someone who made the world feel okay… just by being in it.

And I can't help but think - her messages meant more than I ever gave credit for.

Those "drink water" texts? They weren't random.

Those "sleep early na pleasee" texts? They weren't just cute.

They were love. Pure, gentle, nurturing love.

And now that they're gone…

Now that her name doesn't pop up at 12:03 AM, asking what I'm thinking about…

I understand what they were.

She was the reason I ate on time.

The reason I tried sleeping early.

The reason I took breaks, drank water, walked around, laughed at nonsense, didn't overthink every failure.

She was the reason my life had rhythm.

Not a loud, dramatic rhythm. But a steady one.

The kind you don't notice until it stops.

People talk about love like it's only about big gestures. But her love?

It lived in the smallest things.

It was in the way she waited for me to say "I'm okay" even when I wasn't.

In the way she wouldn't sleep till I said good night first.

In how she used to text, *"Don't take stress, I'm here na."*

And because she was there, I was able to survive days that would've otherwise broken me.

That's what I mean when I say *some nights were softer*.

They weren't easier. They weren't perfect.

But her presence made them breathable.

Now?

Now even breathing feels like work some nights.

I keep checking my phone, even though I know no message is coming.

I keep replaying old voice notes. Not because I miss her voice, but because I miss what it used to make me feel.

Safe. Heard. Loved.

She wasn't just a part of my nights.

She *was* the night.

She brought calm into the chaos, warmth into the cold, and rhythm into my irregular life.

And the worst part?

I didn't say thank you enough.

I didn't realise it was her who kept everything in place - not my discipline, not my routine, not my strength.

It was her.

Her presence changed everything.

And her absence?

It's loud.

It screams through the silence of 1:34 AM when I'm still awake, still typing, still trying to write something that sounds like closure… but feels like an ache.

There was one night I can never forget.

I was at home. There was a pooja happening - one of those traditional rituals where you stay up till late. Family was around, the room filled with chants, incense, and distant relatives talking like it was a reunion.

But even in all that crowd, I kept looking at my phone.

Because she was still texting me.

She had assignments due. Real ones. Important ones. She could've just said, "I'll talk later" and I would've understood.

But she didn't.

She stayed.

The screen lit up with messages every few minutes - little updates, soft teases, her asking if I was getting bored, me asking if she started her work yet.

And it went on like that… till 1 in the night.

I remember telling her, *"Aapko sona chahiye."*

And she replied, *"You're not sleeping either. I'll go when you go."*

That one line?

It wasn't romantic in a filmy way. It was love - raw, real, and rooted in care.

She was tired.

Her eyes were burning.

But she still stayed, because *I was up.*

That was the kind of person she was.

She didn't love with big gestures or over-the-top confessions.

She loved by *staying awake when she should've slept*, by *listening when she was the one who needed rest*, by *choosing me quietly in small, everyday ways.*

That night, I remember putting my phone down for a few minutes, and just thinking… *"She really does love me."*

And I never even told her how much that meant.

But I hope, somewhere, she knew.

Some nights were softer.

Because she was there.

Now,

some nights are just longer.

16

Still Her, Somehow

There are people who leave, and the room feels different.

But there are some… who leave, and the air still smells like them.

It's hard to explain.

You wake up and there's no message. No notification. No missed call.

But your fingers still scroll like they're looking for something familiar.

You type a message - then backspace the whole thing.

Not because you can't send it.

But because you know you won't.

Still, she's there.

Not in your chats. Not in the gallery. Not in the active list.

But in the way you pause on the crying baby gif.

In how you scroll past a song and don't skip it, because it played once on a random night, when everything was still okay.

You don't talk about her now. Not to your friends, not even to yourself.

But then, someone says her name by mistake, and your chest

feels a little heavier.

You don't cry.

But some nights, your eyes do water. For no reason. Or maybe too many.

You walk into a room, hear a word - *"pagal"*, or *"buri"*, or *"pani pio"* - and something in your head whispers: *still her.*

The phrases you once laughed at now land differently.

They echo instead of bounce.

You eat your food late, sleep off-time, skip water.

And somewhere inside, a voice you used to hear still says, *"Dekha? Tum meri baat nahi sunte."*

She's not around.

But somehow, she still is.

You try to focus - studies, goals, people - it all keeps moving.

But there are tiny breaks between tasks.

Seconds between distractions.

And in those seconds, she returns - not loudly.

Not with fireworks or regret or guilt.

Just… a memory sitting in the corner of the room.

You never tell anyone.

Because what will you even say?

That someone who used to message "text me when you reach,"

now hasn't messaged in months -

and yet, you still open that chat window like it's a reflex?

That you stopped saying her name out loud,

but it still forms quietly in your head sometimes -

just to feel something?

There are no explanations left.

No blame. No fixing.

But there's a kind of presence that lingers.

A soft ghost.

Not haunting. Just… existing.
Sometimes, you smile.
At something random.
And your brain instantly thinks - *she'd have laughed at this.*
Sometimes, when you're sick or low, you expect a "take rest" text that never comes.
And you realise, no one else ever cared quite like that.
Sometimes, someone new tries to be close.
And you're kind.
You respond.
But somewhere, your heart says - *it's not her.*
Still her.
Somehow.
It's strange, isn't it?
How a person can be gone,
and still shape your days?
How their absence becomes a part of your routine?
No drama. No closure.
Just… a space.
A soft space where she once sat, and now no one else fits.
Not because they aren't good enough.
But because that shape wasn't meant for them.
You've moved on, maybe.
You don't text her.
Don't write her name.
Don't even say out loud that you miss her.
But then again,
you never needed to.
Because if you have to explain the feeling,
it means it's no longer there.
And this?

This is still there.
Still her.
Somehow.

17

The Hush in Her Goodbye

Some goodbyes don't come with slamming doors or screaming matches.

Some come quietly - like the slow fade of a sunset you didn't realise was happening until the sky turned dark.

Her goodbye was like that.

There wasn't a big breakdown, no shouting, no final scene like the ones you see in movies. Just… a pause. A sentence. And then, stillness.

"The thing I don't want in my home - the angry man."

That was it.

She didn't cry. She didn't raise her voice. She just said what needed to be said. And in that one line, everything ended.

I used to think love would always fix things. That if someone loved you enough, they'd stay - no matter what.

But I was wrong.

Because love… doesn't mean someone has to break themselves just to carry your weight.

I made mistakes.

Some were small - careless words, tone too sharp, moods too

heavy.

Some were bigger - the kind that build up quietly, till they start to crack everything around them.

And some…

Some I knew were wrong the moment I did them. But I still did.

Maybe I thought she'd always understand.

Maybe I thought she'd always come back after I cooled down.

Maybe I just took her love for granted.

Because she was always there.

Until she wasn't.

The truth is - I said things I can't unsay.

Not just once.

Not just in anger.

But in ways that made her question if she was still safe with me.

And that's the worst part - not that I lost her, but that *I made her feel unsafe.*

With my words. My reactions. My silence.

All of it.

She was soft. She was kind. She gave more chances than I deserved.

But there's a limit to even the kindest love.

She didn't leave because she stopped loving me.

She left because I gave her no other option.

And that's a different kind of pain.

I still remember how she used to argue back with me once.

Not in anger, but with hope - like she was still trying to fix what was breaking.

But that day…

That day she didn't fight.

She just looked tired.

Tired of explaining herself.

Tired of waiting for me to understand without her needing to say it again.

Tired of being the only one holding on while being hurt by the same hands she was holding.

And maybe that's when I realised - this wasn't just a fight.

This was her last straw.

And her silence that followed…

That was the actual goodbye.

People say there are two sides to every story. And they're right.

But this story, whatever side you pick - **it still ends with her being the one who loved more.**

She stayed when she shouldn't have.

She forgave what most wouldn't.

She waited, hoping the man she once knew would come back - the one who made her feel loved, not the one who made her feel small.

But somewhere along the way… I stopped listening.

Or maybe… I only listened when it was too late.

Even now, I replay that day in my head.

The things I said.

The way her face dropped.

The moment I realised — *no pasandida mard can say that to his pasandida aurat.*

And in that one instant, I knew…

I had failed.

Not just as a partner, but as someone who was supposed to protect her peace.

And she? She gave me one last sentence — not to hurt me,

but to finally save herself.

"**The thing I don't want in my home - the angry man.**"

She didn't say, *"I'm done."*

She didn't say, *"I'm leaving."*

She didn't need to.

That one line said everything.

I don't blame her.

How could I?

She gave me her energy, her patience, her softness - again and again.

And I gave her blame. Anger. Words that felt like swords.

Not once.

Many times.

And even if she forgave me silently every time…

Her heart remembered.

Love doesn't die in one night.

It just starts to fade when it gets tired of trying.

She was right to leave.

And maybe… just maybe… a little wrong too.

Not *wrong* in the way you think.

But in how she let it all build up till it finally broke.

If only one of us had spoken a little earlier, softer.

If only one of us had paused before reacting.

If only…

But life doesn't work with "if onlys."

Now, there's no one to argue with.

No one to say "you're being rude" or "calm down."

No one to stay after the storm.

Now there's just me - and the memory of how quiet her goodbye was.

No grand exit.

No farewell speech.

Just a hush.

And it was real. Too real.

I live with it now - that hush.

It shows up in the middle of casual days.

In places where we laughed.

In memories I didn't know were being created at the time.

In moments where I wish I could go back and do better.

Would the ending be different?

Maybe.

But the truth is - I didn't protect the love she gave me.

I didn't treat her softness the way it deserved.

And so, **I turned a sweet, warm, loving girl… into someone who had to walk away cold.**

That's on me.

Still, some nights, I hope she knows…

I never stopped loving her.

I just… didn't know how to love her the right way.

And I pray - silently, quietly - that one day, maybe, I'll forgive myself too.

But till then…

I live with the hush in her goodbye.

18

Last Seen, Still Felt

Sometimes, it's the final conversations that stay the longest -

Not because they were long, but because they left things unfinished.

There was a night. It looked like every other one - until something quiet shifted. A familiar chat window. A few lines.

And then… silence that didn't feel temporary anymore.

I didn't beg, not exactly. But I asked - in the kind of way where every word carries more weight than it should.

There were promises. Soft, real, full of hope. But maybe… made too late.

Because somewhere between holding on and explaining, I had forgotten her one simple ask - to be treated like she mattered. Like she was someone worth protecting, even in my worst moments.

But I had been the storm far too often.

She didn't reply with anger. Her words weren't loud.

They fell slowly, like a curtain being pulled over a story that had run out of space to breathe.

I sent a song.

Not because I had the words, but because music does what words often can't.

"Abhi na jao chhod kar, ki dil abhi bhara nahi."

And she… she replied with one of her own.

Not to hurt me, not to challenge me - just to say what needed to be said, without saying it too directly.

"Sanu na gara na yaad, sanu bigri sakyo baat, bujhao afno man, aba hunna bhetghat."

It was one of those nights.

Late. Quiet.

Where the whole world is asleep - except the hearts still breaking.

A few reels followed. No words. Just those soft, loaded clips.

Not chosen at random - each one felt like a whisper from her chest to mine.

About how love could still be real, even if it couldn't survive.

About how letting go wasn't her wish - but maybe, time's demand.

And a few days later, I called.

Not to fix anything. Not to beg.

Just because I was tired, and she'd always been the place I went when everything else stopped making sense.

And she picked up.

Because no matter how far things had gone… **comfort doesn't forget how to answer.**

That was the last.

The final few lines.

The last seen.

But not the last felt.

Now the nights feel different.

There's no waiting for her name to pop up.

No soft ping at 1:43 AM.

Just a pen in hand, a half-told story on the screen, and eyes that cry without asking for permission.

It's strange how quiet the room gets when the one person who filled it with meaning… isn't there anymore.

Sometimes I scroll up. Read through old texts.

Sometimes I catch myself smiling.

And then remembering.

I never deleted the chat.

I just stopped scrolling too far.

As if going back too much might undo whatever healing time has tried to give.

There are moments when I miss her most - not during grand memories, but in small, stupid things.

Like when I'm about to overthink.

Or when I see a meme I know she'd laugh at.

Or when my screen lights up at night and for half a second, I think… maybe.

But I know.

She's not there.

Not in the screen.

Not in the inbox.

Still, somehow, she is.

In how I pause now before speaking.

In how I don't raise my voice the way I used to.

In how I remember to treat someone like they matter - even when everything feels messy.

The tears don't fall as often now.

Not because the ache is gone.

But because the heart's grown used to carrying it quietly.

Maybe I was the right person.

Just… not at the right time.

And that thought doesn't heal everything.

But it makes it gentler.

Bearable, at least.

Forgiving someone is hard.

Forgiving yourself… that's a whole different journey.

But I'm walking it.

Step by slow step.

And even now, in the quietest of hours, when I write about her without writing her name - She's still here.

Not in the ways I want.

But in the way I needed to grow.

Still felt.

Always.

19

The Cry Baby Grew Up

There was a time when every little thing made me cry.

If she replied late, I'd feel like something was wrong. If she forgot to say goodnight, I'd wait, stare at the screen, and sometimes send a sad gif just so she'd know I was missing her. Even small fights made me fall apart.

I used to say, "Aap buri ho," when she didn't respond the way I expected. I'd follow it up with a crying baby gif - the same one, over and over again. I'd type, "Aap mujhse pyar nahi karti ," even when I knew deep down she loved me more than I ever deserved.

I was the cry baby.

Not embarrassed about it. Just… soft. Sensitive. Vulnerable in ways I didn't know how to hide.

And she? She handled all of it. With patience. With calm. With care.

She never made me feel small for being emotional. She didn't laugh when I sent those dramatic messages. She replied with, "Pagal ho aap," and then asked, "Kuch khaya?" Or simply, "Pani piyo."

That was her magic. She didn't need big words to make me feel seen.

Back then, every emotion was loud. Every small thing felt huge.

But now?

Now I've grown. Or maybe… I've just grown quieter.

I don't react the same way. I don't send paragraphs anymore when I feel hurt. I sit with the feeling, try to understand it. Not because I've stopped caring — but because I know what it means to exhaust someone with your own storms.

I used to be scared of silence.

Now, I find myself resting in it.

There was a time when if she was offline too long, I'd feel like I was being left behind. Now, I let go of that panic. I breathe. I remind myself - not everyone leaves. Some just need space.

But even that growth… came from losing her.

I remember how I'd act when I felt insecure. Like a child needing constant reassurance.

If she laughed at someone's message more than mine, I'd overthink. If she didn't text first, I'd wait and sulk and wonder if I still mattered. And every time, she calmed me down.

Her replies weren't always long. But they were warm.

"Don't think too much."

"I'm here, na?"

"Stop crying, silly. I'm not going anywhere."

But one day… she did.

Not because she wanted to. But because I didn't grow up in time.

The cry baby inside me didn't die. He just got quieter.

Now, I don't say "aap buri ho." I whisper it in my head and smile at the memory.

I don't send that crying emoji. But sometimes, I still feel it behind my eyes.

And "Pani piyo"? That line still echoes. Not in chats - but in my head. Like a soft reminder from someone who isn't around anymore, but still lives in the details.

There was a night when I broke down completely. Not because something happened that day - but because I scrolled up in our old chats and saw how much she gave, how gently she loved me, and how easily I took it for granted.

I cried like I used to. But this time, no one was there to say, "It's okay."

So I wiped my own tears. And that was the night the cry baby… took his first step toward growing up.

I've learned to be more patient now.

I don't interrupt people with my emotions.

I give space.

I listen.

And somewhere inside, a small voice always says: *"You have to be better."*

Not just for someone else. But for myself.

Because I remember how it felt to be loved by someone like her. And I don't want to lose that kind of love again - not because of the same mistakes.

Growth doesn't look like becoming cold. It looks like becoming careful.

I still feel things deeply. Still get emotional. Still miss her in

ways I can't explain.

But now, I pause.

I breathe.

I try to understand before reacting.

Because the cry baby learned the hard way that not everyone stays after you break down. Some people need peace. And if you love them, you have to learn how to offer it - not just demand it.

All those gifs. All those teasing lines. All those innocent tricks to get her attention.

They're still with me.

Trapped in the heart.

Like little pieces of a boy who once didn't know how to express love without asking for it constantly.

But that boy… he's grown now.

Not perfect. Not healed completely.

Just… better.

And he carries one sentence like a compass every day:

"**Have to be better.**"

For the quiet love that never asked for more, but gave everything.

For who she believed I could be.

For the cry baby… who finally grew up.

V

A Love That Stayed

Chapter-20: I Found Her in a Poem Once
Chapter-21: She Taught Me How to Be Held
Chapter-22: A Place Without Names
Chapter-23: What I Became Because of Her
Chapter-24: Almost a Memory
Chapter-25: But I Still Thank Her

20

I Found Her in a Poem Once

I wasn't looking for her.

Not really.

I was just flipping through a book one night.

One of those poetry collections where most pages sound the same, until suddenly, one line stops you.

Like it was written with your breath in mind.

That's where I found her.

Not in name, not in full form - but in fragments.

In a sentence that read, *"She was the silence I never knew how to sit with."*

And it hit me.

Because that's what she was.

Not loud, not demanding - just there.

Present.

Soft.

Still.

It's funny how you can lose someone… and then find them again in the most unexpected corners.

A line in a poem.

A whisper in a song.

A stranger's laugh that sounds almost like hers.

Or the way someone says *"pani piyo"* and you pause for just a second too long.

She's not in my life anymore.

But she's still in my sentences.

Still in the rhythm of how I describe love.

Still in the metaphors I use when I talk about missing someone who made the world feel gentler.

There was one poem about rain.

It said, *"I didn't mind getting drenched, because she was the storm."*

And suddenly I remembered all those nights when she stayed through my worst moods.

When she let my words hit her like thunder, and still stayed.

When I was a mess, and she just… held the space without asking me to be anything more than what I was.

She was poetry.

Not the rhyming kind.

But the kind that sits on your chest long after you've finished reading.

I remember once, while texting her late at night, I wrote a random four-line verse and sent it like a joke.

She replied, *"Ye toh acha tha... aur aap toh kab se poet ban gaye?"*

And I laughed. Said I was just bored.

But truth is, she always made me feel like even my mess made sense.

Like even my scribbles had meaning.

With her, I didn't need to sound smart.

Just real.

Now, when I read poems about warmth, I see her.

When I come across lines about someone who loved deeply

but quietly - it's her.
She's in the gentleness between words.
In the pauses.
In the soft endings that don't try to explain too much.
I once read a poem that ended with:
"She didn't stay. But she left enough light for me to find my way."
And I sat with that line for a long time.
Because that's what she gave me too.
Even after everything.
Even after the mistakes, the distance, the silence -
She left me with a kind of light.
Not the kind you see.
But the kind you grow into.
I don't write love poems anymore.
Not because I've stopped believing in love.
But because I already lived my favorite one.
And it didn't need rhymes or titles.
It had her.
In every caring word.
In every fight we overcame.
In every little gesture that said, *"I'm here."*
I found her in a poem once.
But the truth is - she was always poetry.
And I?
I was just a page she once chose to write on.

21

She Taught Me How to Be Held

Before her, I didn't really understand what it meant to be held.

I knew what hugs were.

What comfort looked like on the outside.

But I didn't know what it felt like to truly *let someone in*.

To let them see the parts of you that even you don't sit with for too long.

She changed that.

She didn't hold me like a rescue.

She held me like I wasn't broken in the first place.

When I was at my lowest, she didn't ask what went wrong.

She just said, *"I'm here."*

Sometimes that was all.

Two words.

And everything inside me would loosen.

Because it wasn't about solving me.

It was about **staying when I couldn't carry myself.**

There were nights when I couldn't sleep.

When my mind was too loud, too fast.

She didn't try to quiet it.

She just stayed on the line.

Breathing.

Letting me know I wasn't alone.

And in that silence, I felt something shift - like I was allowed to be tired, messy, unsure.

She made caring feel effortless.

She never said, "Tell me everything now."

She just waited till I felt safe enough to open up.

And when I finally did - she didn't judge.

Didn't flinch.

Didn't back away from the weight of my words.

She took it all in, gently.

Like my pain was something she already expected… and had space ready for.

I remember once, when she was the one falling apart - tired, overwhelmed, unsure - and I told her,

"Aap bas chalti jaoo aage, agar girogi bhi to meri baahon mein hi girogi."

I meant every word of it.

But in time, I realised…

She was the one who truly lived that promise.

She caught me - every time I slipped emotionally, every time I drowned in my thoughts, every time I became a version of myself I didn't like.

She never made me feel like a burden.

She just held on.

Not by force.

Not by grand gestures.

But by simply being there.

She became the comfort I thought I was offering.

Before her, I thought being strong meant never leaning.

With her, I learned that strength also looks like this:
Sitting on a call, voice shaking, and still saying, *"I'm not okay."*
And hearing back,
"You don't have to be."
It wasn't about fixing things.
She couldn't fix my past.
She couldn't erase my scars.
But she didn't need to.
Because every time I unraveled, she wrapped her calm around me like a blanket.
And that was enough.
One time, I cried - for no big reason.
Just… the build-up of everything.
She didn't say, "Don't cry."
She said, *"Cry if you need to. I'm not going anywhere."*
And that?
That was the safest place I'd ever been.
She taught me that being held isn't about arms.
It's about words.
Presence.
Patience.
It's about someone not rushing your sadness.
Not hurrying your healing.
Just… being there.
She never asked me to be perfect.
Just honest.
She didn't say, "Be better."
She said, *"Be here."*
And slowly, in the middle of the mess,
I found peace in being seen.
Now?

Now, when someone asks how I want to be loved -

I think of her.

Not because she stayed forever.

But because she showed me what love *can* feel like when it's done right.

Soft.

Uncomplicated.

Present.

She didn't teach me how to hold someone.

She taught me how to *be* held -

And that… changed everything.

22

A Place Without Names

There are some places you can't locate on a map.

Not because they're imaginary - but because they live between moments.

In the in-betweens.

In the pauses.

In the silences that felt full.

She was that place.

Not a destination.

Not a name in my contacts.

Just… a space where I felt most like myself.

And now, I can't point to where that is anymore. But I know it existed.

A place without names.

We never labeled what we had.

Not properly, not officially.

Not the way the world wanted us to.

There was no *"she's my girlfriend"*, or *"he's mine"* post with a cheesy caption.

No tags. No dates. No anniversaries with cake and candles.

But there were things much bigger than those.

There was that feeling of being understood mid-sentence.

Of texting "I'm tired" and getting a reply that didn't ask why - just told me to rest.

Of being seen - really seen - without having to explain anything.

What do you even call that?

What name do you give to the kind of connection that doesn't ask for introductions?

We had memories without markers.

A random chatpate stall we stood next to -

Not a date spot, but it still tastes different now.

A footpath we once crossed talking about nothing.

Now, every time I walk it, it feels like a memory trying to tap me on the shoulder.

We were in moments more than we were in definitions.

And maybe that's why forgetting her feels impossible.

Because **she's not tied to one place or time - she's in all of them.**

Some days, I wonder why we never gave ourselves a title.

Why we never locked it down with labels.

Would it have helped?

But then I remember… she didn't need a label to love.

She just showed up. Every single time.

In her quiet, consistent way.

And maybe I never asked for more… because deep down, I was already getting everything that mattered.

But now that she's gone -

Now that she doesn't exist in my daily life -

I feel her in odd places.

Not in "her favorite song" or "our place."

We didn't really have those.

Instead, I feel her in the way I pause before sending a long message.

In the way I drink water late at night and think, *"She'd have reminded me by now."*

In the way I fold my thoughts now, neatly, like she once folded my overthinking into calm.

There's no name for this.

Just… an ache shaped like her.

She wasn't my "everything."

That word's too dramatic, too heavy.

She was more like… the *pause* between everything.

The space between my anxiety and peace.

The small quiet between a bad day and a better night.

The deep breath I took when the world felt too loud.

And now that she's not there, I feel like I've lost that breath.

That pause.

That nameless place.

There's this moment I keep going back to.

We were sitting quietly, both on call, both doing nothing.

She said, *"Sometimes it's nice to be together without talking."*

And I didn't get it then.

I was too busy thinking about what to say next.

But now I get it.

Because there's so much I want to say now -

And no place to say it.

No chat window.

No call.

No name to click on.

Just the memory of presence.

That safe silence.

I think we get stuck sometimes, trying to name everything.

Trying to define, declare, decide.

But maybe the most beautiful things…

Are the ones we don't label.

The ones we just feel.

She felt like a place I didn't need directions for.

I'd just arrive.

Message her.

Sit with her words.

Let the world slow down.

And now?

Now I search for that place in other people.

I look for it in conversations that don't flow the same.

In laughs that don't reach the eyes.

In replies that feel delayed - not because they're late, but because they lack weight.

I haven't found it again.

Because **she was that unnamed place.**

I've tried explaining her to friends.

Who she was.

What she meant.

But all I ever end up saying is, *"She was just completely different."*

Because how do you explain someone who made you feel more like yourself than you ever had?

There's no job title for that.

No relationship status.

No correct box to tick.

She was just… my comfort.

My corner.

My safe space.

A place without names.

I remember one line she told me once.

We were talking about dreams, or maybe fears - I don't even remember the topic.

But she said:

"If you fall, I hope you fall somewhere soft."

And I smiled like it was just a nice sentence.

But now I realise -

She was the soft place I fell.

And now that she's gone, I've been trying to land on something that feels even half as gentle.

Some nights, I still write like she's going to read it.

Like my words are travelling through some secret tunnel that leads to her.

Not her inbox.

Not her screen.

Just… her.

And when I finish writing, I stare at the screen.

Knowing full well she won't read it.

But also feeling like… maybe she already knows.

Because you don't forget someone who made your silence feel safe.

You don't forget a place like that.

Even if you can't go back.

There's no closure for something that never claimed to be complete.

No last page.

No end credit scene.

Just a feeling that floats.

That lingers.

That stays, even when everything else moves on.

That's what she is to me now.

Not a person.
Not a past.
Not a mistake.
Just a place.
A soft, quiet place…
Without names.

23

What I Became Because of Her

I didn't realise I was changing when it was happening.

There wasn't a big shift. No dramatic moment.

But slowly… in the spaces she touched, in the words she left behind - I became someone else.

Someone better.

Because of her.

Before her, I thought love was all about proving.

About being perfect.

About giving more than receiving, just to feel worthy.

But with her - it was simple.

She never asked for the best version of me.

She just wanted the real one.

And in doing that, she brought out parts of me I didn't know were waiting to be seen.

I used to be impulsive.

Quick to react. Loud when hurt.

Silence made me uncomfortable, so I filled it with overthinking and blame.

But she…

She was quiet.

Calm.

She let silence sit between us without fear.

And from her, I learned - not everything needs a reply. Some things need *room*.

Because of her, I learned how to breathe before I speak.

I remember how I used to struggle with patience.

I'd want replies right away.

I'd expect her to understand things I couldn't even explain properly.

But she was patient - with me, with my confusion, with my flaws.

She never rushed me.

And without saying a word, she taught me to *slow down too*.

Because of her, I stopped checking my phone every two minutes in anxiety.

I started trusting that people don't have to be loud to be present.

She was never dramatic.

Never made me feel like I had to impress her.

She loved my tired voice.

My sleepy texts.

Even my boring updates about food or classes.

And somewhere in that comfort, I stopped pretending.

I started sharing the truth - even the messy parts.

Because of her, I started choosing honesty over performance.

Before her, I thought being strong meant hiding weakness.

That if I cried, I'd lose respect.

But with her… I cried. A lot.

And she never saw me as less.

In fact, she held my sadness with more grace than I ever held

my joy.

Because of her, I stopped saying "I'm fine" when I wasn't.

I started saying, "Can we talk?"

And I meant it.

She made love feel easy.

Not because we never fought - we did.

But because even in those fights, I knew she wasn't leaving.

That sense of safety? It changed me.

I didn't feel the need to test her love.

I didn't play games.

I just… showed up.

Because of her, I understood that love isn't about intensity - it's about *consistency.*

There was this version of me I didn't know existed.

Softer.

More thoughtful.

A version that remembered to ask, "Did you eat?"

A version that worried when she sounded tired.

A version that waited, and listened, and stayed.

That version came to life because of her.

Even now, when she's no longer here, I still carry those changes.

I pause before reacting.

I choose gentler words.

I listen more.

Not just to others - but to myself.

Because she taught me that loving someone also means loving the version of yourself they helped uncover.

I used to get lost in my emotions.

Drown in them.

But she…

She showed me how to swim.

Not by rescuing me - but by sitting beside me in the water and saying, *"We'll float together."*

And that made all the difference.

There was a time she was low.

Really low.

And I said, *"Aap bas chalti jaao aage, agar girogi bhi to meri baahon mein hi girogi."*

Back then, I thought I was being strong.

But now I know - **she lived that line more than I did**.

She held me through storms I didn't even see coming.

She became the one who caught me - gently, patiently - when I couldn't catch myself.

Because of her, I understand now:

Love doesn't always come in the form of saving.

Sometimes, it comes in staying.

What I became because of her isn't something I can explain easily.

But I see it in small things:

In the way I text a little more mindfully.

In the way I hold space when someone else opens up.

In the way I notice when someone's energy feels off.

In the way I wait, instead of pushing.

She didn't change me.

She simply revealed me.

Even after she left, those parts didn't go with her.

They stayed.

Because they weren't borrowed.

They were built - slowly, lovingly, through her presence.

I still get emotional sometimes.

Still miss her.

Still scroll through old chats and wonder if she'd be proud of who I'm becoming.

And somewhere inside, a voice says:

"**Be the man she believed you could be.**"

Not because I owe her.

But because she gave me the chance to meet a version of myself I genuinely love.

And that… is the greatest gift anyone could give.

What I became because of her isn't a title.

It's not an achievement.

It's not visible on paper.

But it's there.

In how I love now.

In how I say sorry faster.

In how I stay even when it's hard.

In how I sit with feelings instead of pushing them away.

She might never know all of this.

She might never hear these words.

But if somehow she's reading this - even in silence -

I hope she knows…

I became better.

Because she loved me first.

24

Almost a Memory

Some people don't leave all at once.

They leave in pauses.

In pieces.

In slow drifts that you don't even notice until you look back and realise -

they're *almost* a memory.

She didn't vanish.

She faded.

Like sunlight leaving your room, inch by inch.

You still feel its warmth… until suddenly, you don't.

There was a time when I remembered everything.

Her voice, her laughter, the exact way she used to say "pagal ho tum."

The timestamps of our chats.

The tone in her "pani piyo."

Even the way she typed my name - casual, but mine.

Now?

Now I struggle to recall the last thing she said.

Not because it didn't matter.

But because *memory has a cruel way of making space for survival.*
It protects.
By forgetting slowly.
Sometimes, I scroll through old chats.
Not to read.
Just to see that they're still there.
Her name.
The messages.
The crying baby gif I used to send, hoping she'd pamper me back to peace.
Her responses -
"Achha sorry na,"
"Nai na..."
"Ab rowo mat."
I don't open them often anymore.
Not because I don't care.
But because each time I do, I lose her a little more.
It's like holding on to a paper boat in the rain -
The tighter you grip, the quicker it falls apart.
Now, she's in glimpses.
In songs I don't skip.
In a reel I'd normally laugh at, but now pause -
because it sounds like something she'd send at 2 AM.
She's not gone.
But she's not here either.
She's become that space between missing and forgetting.
Almost a memory.
I don't remember her number anymore.
And that scares me.
Not because I ever needed to dial it.
But because once, it was muscle memory.

Now, even my fingers are letting go.
Our photos?
Still there, somewhere in the gallery.
Not hidden.
Not deleted.
Just… untouched.
Like unopened letters.
Because even looking feels like betrayal -
of the quiet we agreed to keep.
There was a day I laughed without thinking of her.
It hit me hours later.
And I didn't know whether to feel proud or broken.
Because that's how forgetting works.
It doesn't ask for permission.
It just… starts happening.
She used to be my first thought in the morning.
Now she's a soft ache before sleep.
Not loud.
Not desperate.
Just there -
like a part of me I don't speak to anymore.
There are days I wonder if she's also forgetting.
If my voice is fading in her head.
If my texts blur when she scrolls up.
If my presence, once steady, is now just background noise.
Maybe that's how it works.
Maybe we both became *almost* to each other.
I remember telling her once, *"Aap toh aadat(Habit) ho meri."*
And habits…
When broken, hurt the most when you're not looking.
She was my habit.

Now she's my pause.
I still hold on to some things.
A playlist.
A line she once said - *"When you miss me, just close your eyes. I'll be there."*
And some days, I do.
I close my eyes.
And I feel… fragments.
Not the whole.
Not her.
Just pieces she left behind.
Like echo.
And echo, too… fades eventually.
You know what's worse than losing someone?
Not knowing when you did.
There was no one final goodbye.
No closure.
No loud ending.
Just a slow fade -
until her name became unfamiliar to my screen,
but too familiar to my soul.
There are things I still want to tell her.
But I don't know who to send them to anymore.
She's not there.
The space is.
But it's empty.
Like a room that still smells like someone,
but has nothing left that belongs to them.
Almost a memory is the hardest place to live in.
You can't grieve it fully - because it's not gone.
You can't love it either - because it's not here.

So you carry it.
Quietly.
Every day.
Like a scar that doesn't hurt… but itches when it rains.
If she ever reads this -
or somehow feels it in the wind, in the words, in the space we once held -
I hope she knows:
She was never forgotten.
She just became softer over time.
Familiar, but out of reach.
Almost.
But never fully gone.
Just…
Almost a memory.

25

But I Still Thank Her

If I ever get the chance to look her in the eyes again-without the weight of expectations, explanations, or apologies-I'd simply say, "Thank you."

Not out of guilt, or regret, or longing.

Just… gratitude.

Because somewhere between our first conversation and the last seen, she gave me things I didn't know I needed. Things that didn't feel like gifts at the time-just moments. Ordinary ones. A text. A call. A check-in. A "pani piyo" at midnight. A silly sticker I made fun of but saved anyway. Her saying "me to buri hoo na," just to hear me say, "nahi aap best ho." And I didn't realize back then that these weren't just little exchanges.

They were lessons.

And for all of them, I thank her.

I thank her for the way she walked in-not dramatically, not loudly, not like a whirlwind-but like a quiet breeze that shifted the temperature of my world. I don't remember the exact date, or the exact words we exchanged that first day. But I remember the way I started feeling lighter, without knowing why. She

didn't ask to stay. She didn't promise forever. She just existed, and that was enough.

I thank her for making me feel heard. For being that one person who didn't rush my words, or try to finish my sentences, or look away when I was being too emotional, too dramatic, too soft. She never made fun of the cry baby in me. In fact, she welcomed him. Gave him space. Let him whine. Let him fall apart. And slowly, because of that space, that boy learned to hold himself.

I thank her for the patience. God, the patience. I look back now and think-how did she even do it? How did she handle all the moods, the blame games, the emotional chaos I threw at her, and still come back the next day like, "tum theek ho na?" She was a fighter in disguise. A soft one. A warrior of warmth. She stayed through more storms than I would have ever stayed through myself.

And I thank her for not staying forever.

Yes, I do. Even that. Because she knew when it was time to leave. When her staying wasn't helping either of us anymore. When her silence would be more healing than her replies. When loving me from a distance would be kinder than staying close and getting hurt again. That takes courage. That takes strength I didn't have at the time. But she did.

I thank her for the boundaries. For finally saying, *"I don't want an angry man in my home."* That one sentence still rings in my head, but now, it sounds like growth. Like someone choosing themselves. And in a way, it made me choose myself too. Because once she walked away, I had to stand on my own-and learn what it means to not let my pain turn into weapons.

I thank her for not throwing my mistakes back at me when I tried to make things right. She could've been harsh. She

could've listed every time I failed. But she didn't. She let the past be the past. Quietly. Maturely. Painfully. And that, too, was a kind of kindness I didn't deserve but still received.

I thank her for all the love she gave me without calling it love. For the concern hidden in sarcasm. For the affection tucked into scoldings. For the way she remembered what I had for lunch more than I did. For sending me reminders to drink water like it was a sacred ritual. For calling me out when I acted like a fool, but always doing it in a way that still made me feel valued.

I thank her for the tiny things. For knowing when to say "goodnight" and when to just stay online until I felt better. For that one day when she was tired, drowning in assignments, but stayed up till 1 a.m. just so I wouldn't feel alone during the pooja at my place. For sending me reels that weren't random, but carefully chosen pieces of how she was feeling. For letting me into her world, little by little, without ever making a grand announcement about it.

I thank her for capturing my madness. Literally. That day when she took that video and said, *"This boy is doing ajib harkat as usual."*

We laughed. We existed. We didn't know it was our last meetup.

But that video? It feels like time stopped for a moment and said, "Here. Remember this. One last time."

I thank her for being my comfort space. The kind where you could sit in silence and not feel awkward. The kind where you could cry without giving a reason. The kind where you didn't have to explain why your day was bad-you just had to say, "it was rough," and she'd say, *"I know."*

I thank her for believing in me when I didn't. For seeing a

version of me I had not yet met. For loving not who I was, but who I could become. And maybe that's the scariest part-because now I wake up every day trying to become that version, not for her approval anymore, but to honor what she saw in me.

I thank her for teaching me how to be held. How to sit with emotions instead of running from them. How to be quiet without feeling guilty. How to be soft without feeling weak. She didn't hold me like a rescue mission. She held me like I was never broken to begin with.

I thank her for not demanding apologies, even when she deserved them. She let me arrive at regret at my own pace. Let me learn. Let me grow. Let me crash. And then rise.

I thank her for the way she became a part of everything-my writing, my playlist, my jokes, my silence. And now, even when she's not around, I still carry her like a voice in my head. Not haunting me. Just guiding me. Like a quiet reminder of who I'm trying to be.

I thank her for making me love writing again. For making me write these pages. Because every word of this book is touched by her. Every sentence echoes something we lived. Every chapter is proof that her presence wasn't a passing moment-it was a transformation.

And lastly, I thank her for walking away with grace. No drama. No final fight. No harsh goodbye. Just a hush. A silence that said everything. A closure that hurt, but healed.

If she ever reads this, I hope she doesn't feel burdened. I hope she smiles. I hope she thinks, *"Okay, maybe he did understand, after all."*

Because I did.

Eventually.

And now, I carry that understanding not as pain, but as

direction.

People say the ones who leave often teach you the most.

She didn't just teach.

She transformed.

She left behind more than memories.

She left behind parts of herself stitched into my character.

So yes…

She's almost a memory.

But the gratitude? That's forever.

And no matter how far she is now…

I will always thank her.

VI

She Was the After

Chapter-26: This one was never about me
Chapter-27 Angels are real

26

This one was never about me

I used to think this story was about me.

My pain.

My heartbreak.

My growth.

My side.

My loss.

But the more I look back-the quieter I become.

Because the truth is loud in my head now, and softer in my heart:

This one was never about me.

It was always about her.

Her love.

Her effort.

Her silence.

Her strength.

Her presence in moments where even I had checked out of myself.

She didn't demand space.

She never said, *"Look how much I'm doing."*

She just… showed up.

Quietly. Constantly.

Even when I was loud.

Even when I pushed her away.

Even when I let my anger speak louder than my love.

I thought I was the one giving more.

I thought I was the emotional one.

The soft one. The broken one. The one who cried.

But look again-

Who stayed when I was at my worst?

Who hugged me with words when I couldn't hug myself with silence?

She didn't just love me.

She *held* me through storms I created.

And still found a way to say, *"It's okay."*

No questions.

No guilt-tripping.

Just grace.

She loved me in ways I didn't even recognise as love.

Not at the time.

I thought love meant drama.

Meant being loud about feelings.

Meant writing paragraphs and over-explaining.

But she…

She just said,

"Pani piyo."

"Kuch khaya?"

"I'm here."

Three words that saved me more than I'll ever admit.

I made it about me so often.

My anger.

My frustrations.
My overthinking.
My expectations.
And she…
She kept making space for it all.
There were days I didn't even ask how she was.
Didn't notice when *she* was tired.
When *she* needed someone to cry to.
Because I was too busy waiting for her to notice my mood.
But she did.
Every. Single. Time.
And now that she's gone-
That absence feels like a mirror I was avoiding for too long.
She didn't just give love.
She gave lessons.
Lessons I didn't ask for.
Lessons I didn't know I needed.
But now… they're all I carry.
She taught me what presence means.
Not with grand gestures, but with *quiet consistency.*
She taught me patience.
Forgiveness.
Listening.
And the hardest lesson of all-
That loving someone doesn't mean breaking yourself every day to fix them.
She left when she had nothing left to give.
And I still had so much to take.
You know what's wild?
Even after everything-
even after all the times I failed to be what she deserved-

I don't remember her ever saying, *"You didn't love me enough."*
She just accepted that sometimes,
love doesn't fail because it wasn't real.
It fails because one person kept giving,
and the other thought that was normal.
I wish I had thanked her more.
For the little things.
For staying up when she was tired.
For checking on me even after arguments.
For not giving up the first time, or the second, or the seventh.
But I was too busy focusing on how *I* felt.
And now, I write pages trying to say what I could've said in one line back then:
"This wasn't about me. This was always about how beautifully she loved."
People ask me why I still write about her.
It's not because I'm stuck.
It's not because I want her back.
It's because *acknowledging love* is a form of healing too.
Because if I don't tell the world how rare she was-
Who will?
She deserved more peace.
More ease.
More being held, not just being strong.
More soft nights instead of fixing arguments.
And while I can't change the past,
I can tell it honestly.
So if you're reading this-
not her, but *you*, the one who's loved someone and didn't realise until it was too late-
say it.

Say thank you.
Say sorry.
Say, "This one wasn't about me."
Because real love isn't just about what you feel.
It's about what they carry.
And she carried me.
Without complaints.
Without credit.
Without asking me to understand what she was giving—
Until she had to walk away to save herself.
Now, I look at love differently.
Not as a feeling, but as a responsibility.
Not as possession, but as presence.
And I owe that to her.
I'll never claim this story as mine alone.
Because **if she hadn't loved me the way she did-**
I'd never have known what love truly feels like.
So no-
This one was never about me.
It was about her grace.
Her patience.
Her care.
Her unmatched, unspoken, unforgettable love.
And now, all I have left is this truth…
She didn't need the credit.
But she deserves the chapter.

27

Angels are real

I didn't believe in angels. Not really.

Not in the white-feathered, winged, halo-glowing kind. Not in divine interventions or souls sent from heaven to watch over broken hearts. I used to think those stories were just soft lies we told ourselves to sleep better at night.

But then, she walked in.

Not from the sky. Not from some place beyond.

She entered like a whisper.

Gentle. Curious.

Like she already knew how loud the world had been for me.

And from the moment we met, the noise dulled.

The chaos slowed.

And for the first time in forever, I didn't want to run anymore.

Maybe angels don't fall from the sky.

Maybe they take trains.

Wear hoodies.

Send "pani piyo" texts.

Take your videos while you're doing bowling actions on the street.

And say *"Pagal ho tum"* with a smile that makes you believe you're still lovable, even in your most foolish moments.

She never said she came to heal me.

She never claimed to be different.

She didn't even call what we had love.

But now that she's gone, I look back and realise:

Only angels love like that.

Only angels leave quietly.

After fixing parts of you they never even mentioned out loud.

She wasn't perfect.

She got tired.

She snapped sometimes.

She pulled away when things got heavy.

But even in those moments, her softness was unmistakable.

She wasn't cold-just human.

But something about the way she forgave… the way she cared… the way she stayed longer than she should have-

That was not ordinary.

She carried more of me than I gave her credit for.

She held space when I didn't know how to ask for it.

And in her eyes, I wasn't a broken boy.

I was someone worth choosing. Over and over again.

Even when I wasn't choosing myself.

She gave me more comfort in her silence than most people do with speeches.

Her absence didn't feel like emptiness.

It felt like a full presence, just… relocated.

Because that's the thing about angels.

They don't stay.

They don't linger for applause.

They don't ask you to remember them.

But you do.

Every time you're at your lowest, and something inside you says,

"She would've understood."

I have cried for her.

Cried *with* her.

Cried because of her.

But today, as I write this final page-

I cry for what she gave.

Unconditionally.

Effortlessly.

Silently.

Like a prayer you didn't realise was working until it stopped.

There were moments she could've walked away.

When my anger was louder than her calm.

When my words were sharper than her peace.

When I stopped being someone easy to love.

And yet-she didn't just stay.

She softened me.

She didn't yell back.

She didn't match my chaos.

She just reminded me-without saying it-that love doesn't have to be loud to be real.

It can exist in a "goodnight" even after a fight.

In a reel at 2 a.m. that says *everything without explaining anything.*

In the way she once stayed up through her exhaustion… just so I wouldn't feel alone.

Who does that?

Only someone sent not to stay forever-

but to change you forever.

I didn't understand it then.

I was too focused on what we weren't.

Too caught up in what was missing.

Too obsessed with trying to make love look a certain way.

But she didn't care about appearances.

She loved behind the curtains.

In the background.

Like an anchor that doesn't beg to be noticed-just *holds you steady*.

Now that she's gone, I see her everywhere.

Not in a haunting way.

Not in the sad kind of flashback you want to erase.

But like light.

In the way I listen more now.

In the way I say "it's okay" to someone, the way she once said it to me.

In the way I sit through my own pain without needing to explode.

Because she taught me that strength isn't about silence.

It's about stillness.

And peace isn't the absence of storms-

It's knowing someone once loved you *through* them.

There's this myth that angels have wings.

Maybe they do.

But hers were different.

They were in her patience.

In the way she held space for things I didn't even know I was carrying.

In the way she took my worst, and still gave me her best.

She never asked me to change.

She just made me want to.
She never asked for loyalty.
She just inspired it.
She never said, *"I'll always be here."*
But she was. Until she couldn't be.
The day she left, it didn't feel like abandonment.
It felt like… release.
Like she had given everything she came to give.
And though I begged, and promised, and cried-
deep down, I knew:
Her mission was done.
And angels don't stay after that.
I still thank her.
Not because I'm holding on,
But because I'm standing-
Better.
Softer.
Quieter.
Kinder.

And I know that wouldn't have happened if she hadn't touched my life the way she did.

She was a thousand little things, all stitched into one person.
A best friend.
A guide.
A mother in disguise.
A mirror.
A quiet home.
A storm shelter.
A pause button.
She was, and always will be,
the proof that angels walk this earth.

And sometimes…
you don't even know you've met one,
until they leave.
So if someone ever asks me if angels are real-
I won't show them feathers, or miracles, or stories.
I'll just say:
"Yes. She existed."
And that… is all the proof I'll ever need.

Author's Note

I didn't write this book because I wanted to tell a love story.

I wrote it because some stories don't leave you until you give them a place to live.

This wasn't fiction.

This wasn't planned.

This wasn't "inspired by true events."

This **was** the truth.

Raw. Soft. Loud in some places. Quiet in others.

It was never about writing a bestseller.

It was never about getting praise.

It was just about putting the weight I carried into words - so it could breathe.

So I could breathe.

This book is for her.

The one who never asked to be remembered, but deserves to be.

The one who gave without keeping count.

Who loved without shouting.

Who stayed longer than she should have, and walked away softer than I deserved.

I wrote this because I couldn't keep telling myself I was okay when I wasn't.

I wrote this because healing doesn't always come from time -

Sometimes, it comes from honesty.

Every page here was a step toward understanding.

Every chapter was a conversation I was too late to have.

And every word was one I never said out loud - but should have.

So if you're reading this,

and you've ever loved someone you couldn't keep,

or lost someone you should've fought harder for,

or found peace in letting go -

then this book isn't just mine anymore.

It's yours too.

Because love like this may not always stay.

But it always teaches.

And it always leaves something behind.

This book is what it left behind in me.

Thank you for reading - not just my story,

but *my truth.*

— Pratiush Adhikari



About the Author

An engineering student who writes from the heart.Even though his studies are all about machines and numbers, his real love is writing about people and emotions. Through his stories, he explores feelings, struggles, and small moments that shape who we are.

He's curious about life and the people around him. He believes that the most powerful stories come from real emotions, imperfections, and the way we grow through life.

When he's not busy with college work, he spends his time writing stories that capture the most meaningful parts of life. His writing comes from a place of care, understanding, and a deep love for what it means to be human.

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Also by Pratiush Adhikari

Shaped By Mistakes



Shaped By Mistakes

A story about a boy who lost the person he loved the most -not because she changed, but because of his own choices. Some were made without thinking. Some, he knew were wrong. But by the time he understood, it was already too late. This is a journey of regret, lessons, and the silent hope that maybe, someday, he'll learn to forgive himself.